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## Political Leadership and the Need to Belong: An Extension of Theory and Practice of Political and Place Leadership through the Lens of Attachment Theory

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**Political Leadership and the Need to Belong: An Extension of Theory and  
Practice of Political and Place Leadership through the Lens of Attachment  
Theory**

In support of an application for a PhD by Published Works.

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on two empirical research projects - an exploration of the experience of losing elected political office and of the mayoral leadership of the new English combined authorities - this paper uses attachment theory to understand the path from political leadership and the leadership of place from a multidisciplinary perspective. In the first study, in-depth interviews with former Westminster MPs and leaders of major councils in England, their partners, and with current politicians demonstrate the problematic nature of leaving elected political office for many with implications not only for the individuals involved but for their partners, families, employers, wider civic society and, the paper goes on to argue, for representative democracy. In the second study, on the basis of interviews conducted with senior figures in local and central government and with other informed commentators, a preliminary analysis of the combined authorities' political leadership is offered. The focus is on the early leadership of the metro-mayors from the perspective of the leadership of place - how place was construed and how leadership of place was being exercised - within the wider context of local governance in England. It argues that public policy and the literature on political leadership could usefully recognize the power of place in the exercise of leadership. The thread underlying both studies is that insights from attachment theory can helpfully inform the theory and practice of political leadership, recognising the bonds that individuals can form with an elected political leadership role and with place. Drawing on literature from a range of disciplines, the paper offers a highly innovative approach to the theory and practice of political and place leadership.

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## **1. Introduction**

My theoretical and empirical research breaks new ground in examining political leadership and the experiences and actions of political leaders by deploying attachment theory as a key lens through which to understand the fundamental human need to belong. I present two empirical research projects examining political leadership in two different settings - on losing political office and on the leadership of place. Both projects are bound together through the analytical use of attachment theory and my work contributes significantly to knowledge and understanding, drawing on attachment theory. Recognising that there is a major gap in the existing literature on attachment theory and leadership, my systematic empirical research contributes substantially to theory and evidence in three major ways. First, my work shows that political leaders often form bonds of attachment to their political leadership role which when disrupted, as in the leaving of elected office, may cause considerable distress, with implications for the individuals concerned, their partners and for wider society. Second, I also show that this has implications for the functioning of representative democracy. Third, my research shows that the affective bonds that people form with place(s) has been neglected in the academic literature on place leadership but I show how these bonds can be effectively harnessed in the exercise of political leadership.

The purpose of this document is to make clear the relationship between my academic works that I am presenting, the theory that underlies them, and the theoretical and empirical contributions that I have made in support of my application for a PhD by Published Works. Drawing on literature from a number of different disciplines, this paper offers highly innovative insights into the theory and practice of political and place leadership.

My published works presented here focus on political leadership. Political leadership is a wide field, but my research has examined the relationship between political leadership through the human need to belong, analysed through attachment theory. My work encompasses two related elements: first, the experiences of political leaders in relinquishing their often deeply cherished political leadership role; and secondly, how the feelings and ties that people have for their geographical and symbolic place, can be harnessed in the exercise of political leadership. My published works here and



this paper together represent a substantial body of work worthy of a PhD. This research has its origins in my curiosity about political leadership, given my background as a child psychiatrist well versed in attachment theory, my experiences as a political leader myself (a former council leader), as well as my work as a Research Fellow in Public Leadership at The Open University. My approach is qualitative in nature and spans literature across developmental, social, political and environmental psychology, psychoanalysis, political science and leadership studies, particularly political leadership and the leadership of place. Given this wide span, I have chosen to focus on the origins and development of attachment theory, the limited literature on attachment theory and leadership, on the similarly limited literature on losing political office and the richer literature on grief and loss of employment, as well as some theories of representative democracy. I have not examined the full range of leadership theory or democratic theory, but rather set the context for my exploration within relational leadership on the one hand, and the thinking behind democratic rotation on the other. Similarly, as indicated later in the text, I have not included all of the voluminous literature on place and place leadership but instead focused on place identity and place attachment and their links with attachment theory.

After the introduction, this document explains the rationale for my research into political leadership and attachment theory, noting the gap which exists due to the more limited literature to date on attachment theory and leadership. It summarises and integrates my published works, explaining how they relate to one another before presenting a critical review of the relevant literature and the contributions to theory, understanding and practice that I have made. The document offers a commentary on the reception given to the publications and, just prior to its conclusion, some personal philosophical reflections on my academic journey.

At first sight, attachment theory and leadership studies may not appear obvious bedfellows. One, attachment theory, now considered primarily within psychology (Holmes, 2014; Cassidy and Shaver, 2018), emerged first from psychoanalysis and ethology in the mid twentieth century (Bowlby, 1958; Bowlby, 2005; Music, 2011; Fonagy 2004; Stevenson-Hinde, 2007); and the other, leadership studies, a discipline that evolved later from management, business and organisation studies (Bryman et al, 2017). On the other hand, there is a voluminous academic literature on leadership: Grint,

Smolovic Jones and Holt (2017) suggest a taxonomy of leadership as person, as result, as position, as purpose and/ or as process. Drawing on the latter perspective, I find helpful the notion that leadership necessarily involves mobilising others in order to achieve certain goals (e.g. Heifetz, 1994; Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2011) – in other words a relational view of leadership. A resurgence of scholarly interest in political leadership came still later (Rhodes and 't Hart, 2016). It is however my contention that the exercise of political leadership can be usefully informed by an understanding of the psychological, biological and evolutionary underpinnings of attachment theory and the fundamental human need to belong. In his reflections on the failures of post-war social democracy and capitalism from an economist's perspective, Collier highlights '*the fundamental need to belong*,' (Collier 2018: p. 65). Lammy (2020: p.15), writing as a serving Member of the Westminster Parliament on 'tribalism' and the divisions within the UK, highlights '*our human need to belong*'. Since many definitions of leadership (e.g. Heifetz, 1994; Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2011) make reference to a reciprocal process by which others are mobilised, how could then an understanding of how humans develop, as individuals and in relation to others, not be worthy of consideration?

Attachment theory is '*a way of conceptualising the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and of explaining the many forms emotional distress and personality disturbance ... to which unwilling separation and loss give rise*' (Bowlby, 2005: p.151). Such needs drive a young child to ensure proximity to their care-giver(s), most often a parent, by either alerting them to their need (by crying, for example) or by physically staying close to them (as in the clingy behaviour of toddlers). Bowlby was fascinated by the work of Charles Darwin (indeed, he was one of his biographers) and saw the proximity-seeking behaviour of children to (predominantly) their mothers as having evolved via natural selection to enhance the survival of infants (Bowlby, 1958; Simpson and Belsky, 2016; Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Bowlby came to see '*the drive to relate – to hold, to cling, to play, to explore, to provide safety*' was an entity in its own right (Holmes, 2014: p. xiii). Bonds of attachment form between child and care-giver(s) and when such bonds are threatened with disruption, distress is evoked. Separation anxiety is readily seen in young children (Bowlby, 1960) and grief reactions throughout life have been widely understood through the lens of attachment theory (Murray-Parkes, 1971). Applications

of attachment theory have now been studied throughout the life span (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2018).

I do not argue that attachment theory provides any sort of panacea or that the theory alone provides useful psychology insights to the exercise of political leadership. The wider field of political psychology has much to contribute to the complexity of political leadership. I am arguing that attachment theory – that has been explored relatively little in relation to the psychological literature on leadership (Popper, Mayseless and Castelnovo, 2000; Game, 2017) – is a useful perspective from which to explore aspects of political leadership.

It should be noted that Baumeister and Leary (1995) advance a ‘belongingness hypothesis’ that a need to belong is a fundamental human motivation which they argue can be considered as distinct from attachment theory. Their account however offers little to that which has been described in richer detail by researchers using a framework of attachment theory and the authors acknowledge that their differences may be interpreted as merely ones of emphasis. There are perspectives on belonging other than psychological – for example sociological (May, 2011), cultural and aesthetic (Savaş, 2014) – but given the span of literature covered in this paper, I do not propose to pursue these perspectives further.

With attachment theory in mind, I explore the relational processes of political leadership, which is an under-developed field. Politicians, after all, are elected to represent others in a range of democratic fora (in Parliament, a council chamber, within the constituency and for most, within a political party) and to construct meaning with and to those whom they represent. I consider here all elected politicians to have a political leadership role by virtue of their position: leadership as position is one of Grint’s (2010) four-fold typology of leadership. Grint makes clear that his typology is a pragmatic attempt at making sense of leadership rather than any claim to a definitive ‘reality’ from an ontological point of view. My exploration has been undertaken in two empirical investigations: first, the transition *from* a political leadership role, an essential leadership task in any democracy; and secondly, how the feelings that people have for place can be harnessed for the exercise of political leadership.

In relation to the first empirical investigation, moving on from a political leadership role is an essential leadership task but it has hardly been studied academically, and this contrasts with the vast literature about acquiring leadership roles. Breaking the ties to the role may be daunting psychologically for the individual but it is inevitable at some point and in some way in any democratic system. The duration of time in democratically elected political office, a political leadership role, is finite, whether by choosing not to contest an election, electoral defeat, completion of a term limit – or even death. Political leaders in a dictatorship may face a more violent end to their leadership, either by assassination and/ or exile (Baturu, 2014).

My findings suggest that the loss of political office for many politicians is a far more significant transition for them and their partners than is often recognised. From a consideration of the analysis of my findings, I go on to argue that the exercise of political leadership legitimately includes a responsibility to facilitate a reasonably smooth transition to a successor of reasonable competence. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson, in his letter in 1807 to the legislature of Vermont in 1807, made clear, *'that I should lay down my charge at a proper period is as much a duty as to have borne it faithfully'* (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-the-legislature-of-vermont/>). More recently, Kets de Vries (2003: p.116) echoes the sentiment with his injunction that, *'Leaders have to accept the transience of their role and the fact that they have a responsibility to the next generation.'* Yet my literature review shows that there has been relatively little study of this phenomenon, whether in political leadership or more broadly about any type of leadership.

My second empirical research project addresses the leadership of place. In any system of representative democracy where politicians are elected on the basis of geographical constituencies, political leadership is intrinsically about the leadership of place, albeit at different spatial levels (e.g. national, devolved, local levels). In the UK, with an electorate defined by place, how could it be otherwise? There is often a bond of some sort both between people and the place where they live (Goodhart's (2017) 'Anywheres' notwithstanding) and between politician and the place they represent (Nicolson, 1996; Fried, 2000; Tomaney, 2013; Roberts, 2017; Jackson, 2019; Pabst, 2021). Notably Westminster MPs increasingly are likely to originate from the area that they represent (Gandy, 2018). The Boundary Commission for England (2018)

recognises the need to have regard to 'local ties' in their five yearly reviews of electoral boundaries and it recognises in its 2018 review of boundaries that any change in boundaries that breaks local ties '*resonates the most with the general public*' (p.8). Lammy (2020: p.190), a Westminster MP, observes how '*place is fundamental in creating and preserving our identities*'. How people and their elected representatives relate to 'place' then is an important topic within the field of political leadership.

Through both of my areas of empirical research, I will show that an understanding of the importance of the human need to belong and how this links with attachment theory informs the exercise of political leadership both in terms of the path from political office and the leadership of place.

I had begun the academic work presented here with little idea that I would draw on attachment theory despite my deep familiarity with the theory and its applications as a Consultant Child Psychiatrist in NHS clinical practice for over twenty years. I was simply curious about the experience of losing political office. To my surprise, there was relatively little in the academic literature on the subject – as I detail later in this paper - and I set out therefore to investigate further. The study on the political leadership of the new English combined authorities and the role of place was separately conceived some while later in my role as Research Fellow in Public Leadership at The Open University. It was only after completing both pieces of research that I came to realise that attachment theory and the need to belong was the underpinning of both research studies, and to contend that attachment theory could provide profound theoretical and practical insights into the exercise of political leadership. I could be considered then to have turned a full circle in my intellectual journey having first dipped my toes into the extension of attachment theory over two decades ago with the joint editorship of a book, 'The Politics of Attachment' (Kraemer and Roberts, 1996) - but now with a much deeper and more critical appreciation of theory from across different disciplines and of its (and my critical realist) philosophical basis, as I describe below.

## 2. Political leadership

I briefly introduce the concept of political leadership that has received less attention within leadership studies than other forms of leadership, even relational leadership, although the field of political psychology has traditionally been interested in the behaviour of individuals within a political system, as I document below.

Political leadership is said to be a puzzle (Rhodes and 't Hart, 2016; Bennister, 2016) and '*confused and amorphous*' (Elgie, 2015) because it remains conceptually diverse and for the most part ill-defined with no unified theory of leadership, but still '*it fascinates and intrigues*' (Bennister, 2016: p. 3). Political philosophy has long struggled with what in classical Athenian times were called 'rulers' and their relationship with those whom they ruled (Aristotle, 1992; Plato, 2007; Wren, 2007). In any democratic system, there are tensions between the notion of a leader and an egalitarian ideal (Ruscio, 2004; Wren; 2007; Femia 2009) in that leaders are, by virtue of their leadership position, inevitably set apart from others: '*Leaders are not, by definition, everyone*' (Ruscio, 2004: p.3). To what extent should political leaders be constrained? As Rhodes and 't Hart put it (2016: p. 2), '*Democratic leaders are caught in the cross fire between the hopes placed in them and the challenges to, and constraints on, their authority*'. To what extent are political leaders individuals able to influence and effect change (Elgie, 2015)? Or are they at the mercy of context, historical and institutional, and more proximate events – the so-called agency-structure duality (Rhodes and 't Hart, 2016)? These questions continue to be explored because academics adopt fundamentally different ontological and epistemological positions (Elgie, 2015) which provide quite divergent insights. However, we all depend on political leadership, for good or ill, despite widespread public cynicism. Political leaders, after all, hold considerable sway over our lives and, as summarised by Hartley and Benington (2017: p. 204), '*political leadership therefore matters because politics matters.*'

Political psychology is largely concerned with '*the behaviour of individuals within a specific political system*' (Huddy, Sears and Levy, 2013: p. 3). Since Lasswell's (2009) psycho-biographical approach to political science in the 1930s, it has shed light on

aspects of political leadership in particular, the motivations, personality and ambition of individual leaders. Exploration of the personality profiles of political elites, including those of political leaders (Winter, 2013), of 'dark leadership' and its associated triad of personality traits (e.g. Furtner, Maran and Rauthmann, 2017) and narcissistic leadership (e.g. Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006) using psychological theory have been informative. While Renshon (2016) values psychoanalytic theory for its insights into the motivations and behaviours of political leaders, he urges caution in its over-zealous application to studies of political leaders and leadership. A search for unconscious motivation in a political leader may, Renshon suggests, lead to inappropriate and unnecessary speculation. Instead, observable patterns of elements of character may offer more reliable insights.

Beyond a focus on individual leaders, it is now well recognised that leadership inevitably involves a relationship between leaders and those who are led (Popper, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006), and further, that there are inherent tensions, contradictions and ambiguities in the 'dialectical', mutually constituting relationship between leaders and followers (Collinson, 2005). This is particularly pertinent for political leadership where political leaders in modern democracies are explicitly tasked with representing their constituents. Although Hollander (1958) was one of the first to recognise the relational nature of leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006), the term relational leadership is relatively new within leadership studies. But it should be noted that even in the late 1940's, Bowlby, whose work on attachment I detail later, highlighted the importance of leaders and their relationship with those who are led, albeit using the psychoanalytic term 'libidization' (Bowlby, 1946).

Relational leadership is an umbrella term encompassing a set of ideas but at its core is the idea that leaders and 'followers' exist in a reciprocal relationship and '*it is the relationship itself that constitutes what we refer to a leadership*' (Clarke, 2018: 1) rather than the characteristics and behaviours of individual leaders. In relational terms now, leadership is thought to emerge through the interactions of leaders and followers in a dynamic process between them and the context in which the interactions take place. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011: 1434) make clear, '*Relational leadership means recognizing the entwined nature of our relationships with others*' and, furthermore, '*it means understanding the way we engage with the world – not as already formed but*

*as always emerging in our interactions and relationships with others'* (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011: p.1438).

Within relational leadership, both an 'entity' and a 'socio-constructionist' perspective have been proposed depending on differing ontological views (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The former views leadership relationships as arising from the cognitions, emotions and perceptions that individuals develop about those relationships while the latter, a socio-constructionist view, places more emphasis on the context in which relationships take place that influences how meaning is co-constructed. Seen from a constructionist perspective, meaning is thought to be generated and sustained in the context of ongoing relationships and not just communicated within them (Drath et al, 2008). These two approaches within relational leadership are however not necessarily mutually exclusive and Uhl-Bien (2006), thinking about leadership within the work-place, has proposed an integrative framework. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011: 1437) suggest that *'relational leadership means recognizing the intersubjective nature of life, the inherently polyphonic and heteroglossic nature of relationships, and the need to engage in relational dialogue'*. They stress the importance of the 'mundane' small details and nuance in that relational dialogue including the degree of attunement and responsiveness.

Within what may be regarded as relational leadership, Hogg (2001) proposed a model of leadership that views leadership as a group process arising from the social categorisation and depersonalisation processes associated with social identity. Followers collectively conceive of themselves ('self-categorise') as part of a social group, an 'in group', on which a leader can draw and be 'prototypical' of that group. Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) have developed social identity theory further to thinking about political leadership, where the task of leadership is not to cultivate a sense of one's own specialness but to forge and enhance a sense of shared identity. Leaders then need to be skilled *'entrepreneurs of identity'* (Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2011: p. 71). They need to craft a sense of *'us'* and to communicate that they are *'one of us'*, that they are working on our behalf, *'doing it for us'*, and that they *'making us matter.'* Haslam and colleagues suggest that effective political leaders actively shape the social identity of the group of which they and their followers are a



part. Reicher and Haslam (2017) offer a persuasive account on this basis of how populist political leaders such as Donald Trump can gain power.

Interestingly before his seminal work on attachment theory, Bowlby, in his early essay on psychology and democracy, recognises the power to the individual of being part of a group with a common aim, led by a 'libidinized' (that is, invested in energy akin to love) leader: he refers to how '*the co-operating group itself comes to be emotionally valued*' (Bowlby, 1946: p. 65). While Bowlby was writing then in a very different context, this early paper demonstrates his interest in wider societal issues. Indeed, he had a close friendship with Evan Durbin, a leading thinker in the British Labour Party until the latter's untimely death in 1948 (Holmes, 2014).

Attachment theory seems to feature little in the literature on 'relational leadership' despite its focus on reciprocity and the quality of the earliest relationships on the development of individuals and their relationships with others particularly the capacity to trust. Perhaps this is to be expected given its roots in very different disciplines with different ontological and epistemological assumptions and that it is associated largely with development in childhood rather than its implications in adulthood and more widely. Noting Uhl-Bien's (2006: 672) comment specifically with reference to the workplace, that '*we know surprisingly little about how relationships form and develop*', I suggest that attachment theory might usefully contribute to these discussions. I turn now to attachment theory.

### **3. Attachment theory**

In this section, I explain the origin of attachment theory in the body of work undertaken by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth to understand the nature of the relationship between a child and its mother and its impact on child development. It is important to understand the mechanisms proposed within attachment theory given the subsequent work that I then critically examine, on the value of attachment theory and its impact on relationships in adulthood that may more obviously link to considerations about leadership. I then explain the profound influence of attachment theory in psychology before considering in more detail the surprisingly limited literature on attachment theory and leadership.

### 3.1 Origins of attachment theory

‘Attachment’ is a term often used loosely but attachment theory describes a field of scientific research originated by John Bowlby (1958) who was trying to understand the nature of a child’s tie to its mother. He drew on insights from ethology (Bowlby, 1958; Stevenson-Hinde, 2007), intrigued for example by how goslings follow closely behind their mother. Together later with Mary Ainsworth in the latter half of the twentieth century (Cassidy, 2018), Bowlby posited that humans have a fundamental need for security, both physical and emotional, and how these needs are met will profoundly influence our development and our relationship with others (Bowlby, 1988). Such needs are rooted in our biology and are seen across the animal kingdom (Bowlby, 1958; Stevenson-Hinde, 2007). Attachment theory owes much to Klein’s object relations theory within psychoanalysis (Bowlby, 1958; Fonagy, 2004; Fonagy et al, 2018) and to ethology and evolutionary biology (Bowlby, 1958; Stevenson-Hinde, 2007; Sroufe, 2018) and has links also with cognitive psychology and systems theory (Holmes, 2014). Yet it has developed into a paradigm in its own right with later work examining for example the influence of attachment patterns in early childhood and the narratives that people tell about themselves many years later (Music, 2011).

Bowlby’s interest in the relationship between children and their mothers began soon after he graduated in medicine after the Second World War (Holmes, 2014; Ezquerro, 2017). Working in a home for ‘maladjusted’ boys where residents had experienced major disruption in their maternal relationships, Bowlby came to believe that such relationship disruptions were the precursors to later psychopathology (Cassidy, 2018). His work then sought to understand the nature of a child’s tie with its mother (Bowlby, 1958). Bowlby drew on a wide variety of sources - evolutionary biology, ethology, developmental psychology, and systems theory - to inform his thinking (Cassidy, 2018).

Mary Ainsworth whose work was seminal in developing attachment theory, was a member of Bowlby’s research team (Cassidy, 2018). Ainsworth conducted two naturalistic observation studies of mothers and children at home, one in Uganda in the 1950s and the other, later, in Baltimore, USA. She subsequently later created a tool to assess attachment quality, the Strange Situation Test (Cassidy, 2018). This tool

involves detailed observation of an infant aged between 9 and 18 months over eight episodes of three minutes each, with and without their mothers and with and without a stranger in the room. The infants' reaction to their mothers as she is re-united with them and their ease of being comforted by her is particularly important in classifying infants, initially into three categories, of attachment security: secure; insecure-avoidant; insecure-anxious/ambivalent (sometimes called resistant) (Holmes, 2014; Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Ainsworth highlighted the importance of the responsiveness and sensitivity of a care-giver towards an infant, rather than the amount of care-giving time or the warmth of a care-giver towards a child (Fearon and Roisman, 2017; Cassidy, 2018).

### **3.2 Attachment styles**

From the Strange Situation Test, patterns of childhood attachment, 'attachment style', can be differentiated into those that are 'secure' – when an individual has a consistent expectation that a caregiver will be available, comforting and meet their needs such that they can confidently explore their world – and 'insecure' with different patterns of insecure attachment, now three in number (avoidant, anxious-ambivalent (or resistant), and disorganised) seen within this category (Holmes, 2014; Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Infants classed as securely attached may be able to be comforted by a stranger when their mother leaves the room but not to the same extent as when their mother returns. They store internal working models of a responsive and reliable care-giver and can internalise a sense of self that is loved and worthy of being loved - and thus feel more secure to explore their surroundings without fear of separation.

On the other hand, an insecure anxious-ambivalently attached child may have experienced inconsistent or intrusive care-giving while infants showing an avoidant attachment pattern may have experienced consistently insensitive or rejecting care-giving. Insecurely attached infants have less sense of their own value and less able to be comforted either by a stranger or by their mother, either avoiding mother when she returns or being ambivalent towards her, perhaps clinging on to her and/ or angrily resisting her attempts to comfort. The additional category, 'insecure-disorganised', was added through the work of Mary Main and colleagues in the 1980's who recognised a group of children who behaved oddly – often frozen, fearful and wary -

in the Strange-Situation Test. Such children are either frightened of and/ or frightening to their care-givers as a result of the unresolved loss or trauma in the care-givers' history (Holmes, 2014).

That patterns of attachment relationship could be measured has led to a vast number of empirical investigations over the years since, confirming the normativity of secure attachment in environments where there is relatively little stress, the link between sensitive care-giving and secure attachment, and the competent child outcomes (positive peer relationships, self-esteem, emotional regulation and behaviour) through to adolescence and young adulthood (Holmes, 2014; Sroufe, 2018). Similar patterns of attachment have been described in all countries where such research has been conducted - in Africa, East Asia and Latin America - whether by ethnographic descriptive study and/ or standardised observational study further supporting the notion of the universal application of attachment theory albeit, as expected from an evolutionary perspective, within contextual determinants (Mesman, van IJzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz, 2018).

It should be borne in mind that in some circumstances, an insecure attachment style may be self-protective, perhaps where heightened vigilance for whatever reason is necessary (Crittenden, 2006). There is some suggestion now that categories of attachment style might better be seen as dimensional in nature and that the insecure-resistant and insecure-disorganised patterns may not be mutually exclusive (Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Further exploration of this question has been encouraged (Fearon and Roisman, 2017). Furthermore, it should be cautioned that attachment styles are not immutable and may well change in response to what happens in the child's environment for example, family disruption. Nor does the security of our earliest attachment bonds alone determine how we approach our relationship with others and our developing personality but it seems to start us off with more resilience than otherwise would be the case (Music, 2011; Holmes, 2014; Sroufe, 2018).

The drive to relate – *'to hold, to cling, to play, to explore, to provide safety – was an entity in its own right'* according to Bowlby (Holmes, 2014: 48) and was claimed to be an evolutionary imperative with the relationship between infant and caregiver seen as key to human adaptation and survival (Bowlby, 1958; Sroufe, 2018). In the earliest

years, a child is dependent on proximity to at least one attachment figure, usually a parent (or two) in the first instance, to provide the warmth, sensitivity and consistency necessary in order safely to organise their experiences and form emotional bonds of attachment. Attachment bonds are seen as specific type of a larger class of bonds, 'affectional bonds,' that individuals form throughout their life. The key criterion distinguishing a bond of attachment is that at times of distress, an individual seeks security and comfort in the relationship with another person (Bowlby, 2005; Cassidy, 2018). Behaviourally, a child initially stays close to that attachment figure(s) seeking a secure base from which they learn to explore and to which they can return, a safe haven, at times of distress. A child may well have a number of attachment figures but it is not unlimited and within the number, there is a hierarchy, most often with the mother as prime (Cassidy, 2018). The extent to which a child's attachment styles are consistent across different caregivers is not clear: concordance varies across different studies and if they are dissimilar, it is not understood how a child develops an integrated internal model of the self (Cassidy, 2018).

### **3.3 Internal working models of attachment**

With a secure base, children can develop 'internal working models of attachment' – cognitive structures that organise beliefs and expectations about ourselves and our relationships with others - that make coherent sense of the world (Holmes, 2014). There are parallels here with the idea of social cognitive structures in social-cognitive psychology although Mikulincer and Shaver (2018) caution that attachment working models cannot be directly equated given that they evolve not just from actual experiences but from dynamic processes driven by the wish for proximity and security.

According to the theory, attachment models form the basis of our understanding of what is going on around us and set the scene for stable personality development. If we grow within the context of warm, stable and loving relationships, we develop a coherent sense of ourselves and of others, a capacity for trust, and are better able to manage our thoughts, emotions and behaviour not just in childhood but throughout life (Music, 2011; Homes, 2014; Cassidy, 2018). Today, at least in Western countries, the emphasis within attachment theory is less on the gross disruptions of care and separation as a result of war-time evacuation, parental death or severe neglect as

seen in Romanian orphanages under Ceaucescu (Rutter et al, 2007) but on the subtleties of the interaction between parent and child that contribute to the qualitative nature of the attachment bond. Parental responsiveness, sensitivity and attunement with the child have become more the focus of attention (Holmes, 2014), enabling a child to make coherent sense of the world: *'the organisation of meaning depends on a maturing power to conceptualise the relationship between feelings, purposes and actions.'* (Marris, 1993: ix).

### **3.4 Attachment in adulthood**

Although other factors come into play, it is through internal working models that childhood patterns of attachment are carried through into adult life (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2018; Simpson and Karantzas, 2019) and transmitted to the next generation. In adulthood, our early dependency may not be as obvious as in childhood but remains as a 'hidden regulator' (Hofer, 2006; Holmes, 2014), available at times of distress.

The field was considerably advanced by the development by Mary Main and colleagues, of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (van IJzendoorn, 1995), a semi-structured interview in which adults are asked to describe their childhood and their relationship with their parents. It is less the content than the narrative style that is key (Holmes, 2014). The state of mind with regard to attachment that emerges is assigned one of four categories comparable to those in the Strange Situation Test: autonomous-secure; dismissing-detached; pre-occupied-entangled; and unresolved-disorganised, each reflecting different internal working models of attachment, (Holmes, 2014). The AAI has been shown to predict the quality of the infant-parent attachment and to predict the responsiveness of the parent (van IJzendoorn, 1995) although the associations between early care-giving experiences and adult attachment style are relatively small in magnitude (Fraley and Roisman, 2019). Other measures of adult attachment using self-reports of feelings and behaviours about relationships with others have been used, for example, Bartholomew's Relationship Questionnaire (Griffin and Bartholomew, 1994, cited in Popper, Mayseless and Castelnuevo, 2000) and Hazan and Shaver's classification of secure, avoidant and ambivalent adult attachment style drawn from how people describe their feelings in close relationships

(Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Hazan and Shaver, 1990). There appears to be no consensus about which instrument is most useful (Keller, 2003).

The implications of attachment styles on romantic attachments (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Feeney, 2018) and in the work-place (Hazan and Shaver, 1990) have been investigated although the authors recognise relationships are complex, powerful phenomena subject to many influences other than attachment style alone. Others have explored possible implications of attachment theory on a group and societal level (Kirkpatrick, 1992; Marris, 1993; Smith, Murphy and Coats, 1999; Mayseless and Popper, 2007; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2018; Gillath, Kazantas and Lee, 2019) including in my own work (Kraemer and Roberts, 1996). In summary, people with a secure attachment style tend to enjoy deep, pervasive, stable and well-integrated feelings of self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-efficacy; to have closer social ties; to be able both to support others and be supported by them; and to be able to meet life's inevitable disappointments with reasonable equanimity (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2018; Gillath, Kazantas and Lee, 2019). It should be cautioned however that '*foundations are not fate*' (Fraley and Roisman, 2019: p.27), that is, while adult attachment has its roots in early childhood experiences, it is not determined by them alone. The degree of stability of attachment security from infancy to adulthood is the subject of considerable academic debate (Fearon and Roisman, 2017). There is much still to learn about the influences on adult attachment style not least possible gene-environment interactions even though there is currently limited evidence of genetic influence on attachment security (Fraley and Roisman, 2019).

### **3.5 The influence of attachment theory**

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory opened a rich seam of research in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century and since: it '*instigated a revolution in psychological science*', *having a profound impact on clinical psychology and psychiatry, developmental psychology and social psychology*' (Sroufe, 2018: p.997). A vast array of empirical work has confirmed the key hypotheses of attachment theory: that variations in infant attachment are rooted in the quality of early parent-infant interaction; that these variations in attachment are the foundation for personality formation; and that 'internal working models' are the means by which lived experience is carried forward (Sroufe, 2018).

Professor Sir Michael Rutter noted in 1995 that most of the key components of attachment concepts had received empirical support' (Rutter, 1995) and he has since observed that '*attachment theory continues to be relevant in a wide range of domains, and none of the new empirical evidence challenges the theory's basic tenets*' (Rutter and Azis-Clauson, 2018: p.991). Childcare policies, institutional practices and the understanding of family disruption are all areas that have been informed and significantly changed by the application of attachment theory (Rutter and Azis-Clauson, 2018).

While Sroufe writes that attachment theory has contributed '*virtually without parallel*' (Sroufe, 2018: p. 997) to the understanding of the nature of development, he cautions against making over-reaching claims for it. Attachment theory makes very specific predictions about expectations of the self, others and relationships; of basic security; of emotional regulation and of a well-functioning personality. But it does not for example, predict many aspects of cognitive functioning. And there are many other wider contextual factors that influence human development, not least supportive experiences and relationships after infancy and socio-economic status (Sroufe, 2018).

As noted above, the need for some thread of consistency remains throughout life. When this consistency is disrupted with the breaking of a bond of attachment, as in for example, bereavement, we grieve – that is, feel an intense sorrow and distress that disrupts our normal relationship with the world (Bowlby, 1960; Bowlby, 1998; Bowlby, 2005; Murray-Parkes, 1971; Marris, 1993). Grief in response to the death of someone close is seen in all cultures of the world (and in other primates) (Bowlby, 1961). But any significant loss can precipitate such feelings. Marris (1993) notes how profoundly disruptive experiences of wider change, loss and transition can be. He observes how a range of significant transitions – not just from bereavement but from divorce, seeking refuge, re-housing or even unfamiliar new business ventures - evoke similar patterns of response as we struggle to find meaning and an evolving identity within much changed circumstances. He makes clear that such a crisis can arise just as much from voluntary as involuntary changes: in either, '*The anxieties of change centred upon the struggle to defend or recover a meaningful pattern of relationships,*' (Marris, 1993: p.1).



Given the evidence summarised above with the detail on the ways in which our attachment history influences our sense of self and of others and our adult relationships, it is logical to consider that attachment theory can usefully inform leadership so I now turn to this.

#### **4. Attachment theory and leadership**

Although it has been widely recognised in recent years that leadership intrinsically involves a relationship with those who are led (Popper, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006), there has been relatively little literature on attachment theory and leadership in general and less still with regard to political leadership: the attachment and leadership literature is still in *'its infancy'* (Game, 2017: 326). This is curious given that attachment theory has at its core a focus on the importance of quality of the earliest relationships that then influence how we interact with others throughout life. Yet, *'if researchers were to look deeper into its dimensions and strengths'*, Bresnahan and Mitroff (2007: p.608) suggest that attachment theory could become a strong foundation for leadership theory and research precisely because the internalisation of the relationship between care-giver and the child becomes a template for how individuals address issues that occur in everyday life in interaction with others.

At the core of much of the attachment conceptualisation of leadership is the assumption that the leader-follower relationship is an attachment relationship with leaders providing both a safe haven for followers at times of need and a secure base from which to engage in self-development (Popper and Mayseless, 2003; Game, 2017). In the following sections, I examine in detail the work that has been done in Israel by Popper, Mikulincer and colleagues who have led the field on the links between attachment theory and leadership, as well as more limited contributions from elsewhere. Notably however, political leadership has been little explored in this literature as I go on to demonstrate.

##### **4.1 Studies from Popper, Mikulincer and colleagues**

Much of the work on attachment theory and leadership has been conducted by Popper, Mayseless and colleagues in Israel, (Mikulincer and Florian, 1995; Popper,

Mayseless and Castelnovo, 2000; Popper, 2002; Popper and Mayseless, 2003; Mayseless and Popper, 2007; Popper and Amit, 2009; Mayseless and Popper, 2019). Studies have focused on leaders and what associations there may be between leaders' capacity to lead and their attachment styles. Epistemologically, the authors lay great store by questionnaires, often bespoke that they have developed, and whose reliability or validity is difficult independently to ascertain. applied in very particular contexts, often with young male members of the Israeli Defense Forces. While of considerable interest, these studies are not readily generalisable given the very specific occupational background, age range and institutional context of research participants.

One of the earliest studies was by Mikulincer and Florian (1995) who looked at how 92 18-year old recruits in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) coped with combat training and compared this with their attachment style and with peer nominations of their leadership ability. They completed an attachment scale based on the well validated Hazan and Shaver's classification of attachment styles - secure/ anxious/ avoidant – (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Hazan and Shaver, 1990) at the beginning of their training and again at completion, four months later. Participants reported on how they appraised the training and how they coped with it using a shortened version of the Ways of Coping Checklist although it is not clear from the paper how the checklist was shortened and how its validity might have been affected. However, the findings seem to be robust in that compared with their securely attached colleagues, insecure-anxious individuals reported coping less well with the training and were assessed by peers as less suitable for leadership roles. Insecure-avoidantly attached recruits reported the training as more threatening than their securely attached colleagues and coped by using distance and less support. On the other hand, this latter group did not differ from the secure group on suitability to leadership in the evaluation of peers. It should be noted that the sample had been rigorously assessed prior to entering the army for physical and mental health, social functioning and motivation to join the army: indeed, there was a relatively low percentage of insecurely attached individuals, possibly because a number had been excluded from joining the combat units in the first place. In addition, '*a handful*' of recruits declined to participate (Mikulincer and Florian, 1995: p. 408). They were therefore a particularly select group in a very specific context and caution is necessary before these findings can be generalised.

Popper and colleagues suggest that a secure attachment pattern is most likely to be seen in transformational leaders (Popper, Mayseless and Castelnovo, 2000) and in 'socialized charismatic leaders' (Popper, 2002). In this first paper, Popper, Mayseless and Castelnovo (2000) test their hypothesis that three key elements of transformational leadership – charisma, individual consideration (of others), intellectual stimulation – would correlate with a secure attachment style by conducting three studies within the Israeli military each with different groups of cadets and/or commanders. In the first study, experienced police psychologists conducted structured interviews with the commanders of a group of 85 male cadets in the Israeli Police, gathering the commanders' questionnaire evaluations of the cadets' leadership and attachment styles. They used a revised version of Bass's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to evaluate participants' leadership and Bartholomew's Relationship Questionnaire to evaluate attachment style. In the second study, a group of 85 cadets in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) completed themselves the attachment style questionnaire while their commanders evaluated their leadership style. Lastly, in the third study, the leadership style of 39 squad commanders in the IDF infantry was evaluated by their soldiers while the commanders completed the attachment questionnaires. In all of these studies, the authors hypothesis was confirmed with a significant positive correlation between a secure attachment style and transformational leadership in terms of charisma, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation.

In the next study here, Popper (2002) used similar methods to examine empirically the difference between 'personalized' and 'socialized' charismatic leaders (House and Howell, 1992) with two studies conducted with larger samples – 132 and 384 respectively - male cadet squad commanders within the IDF. Participants completed questionnaires developed specifically for these studies to measure personalized charismatic leadership (PCL) and socialized charismatic leadership (SCL), and the Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI). Socialized charismatic leaders are thought to be motivated by their ideals in contrast to the personal gain motivation of personalized charismatic leaders (House and Howell, 1992) with narcissism, rooted in early life experiences, hypothesised as being the key criterion distinguishing the two types (Popper, 2002). The construct validity of the NPI has been ascertained (Emmons, 1984) while Popper (2002) describes the steps taken to assure the reliability and

validity of his bespoke measures of the two types of charismatic leadership. Popper (2002) finds significant positive correlations between personalized charismatic leadership and narcissism, and with an avoidant attachment style but he does not acknowledge that the two types of charismatic leadership (PCL and SCL) types are not necessarily mutually exclusive (House and Howell, 1992).

Popper et al (2004) test out the suggestion from their review of the literature that three broad strands of capacity for leadership – self-confidence, proactive optimism and the ability for pro-social relationships expressed by a secure attachment style – are essential for leadership. In so doing, they explicitly return to a ‘trait’ theory of leadership (Chemers, 1995) – that leaders demonstrate specific traits that separate them from those who remain followers – but *‘now equipped with many more measurable concepts on personality’* (Popper et al, 2004: p.246). They administered questionnaires to 402 soldiers in the armoured and infantry corps of the IDF nearing the end of their three-month training, using a number of instruments to evaluate leadership potential (including locus of control, self-efficacy, trait anxiety, an optimism index) as well as the Attachment Style Questionnaire based on Hazan and Shaver (1987) and validated by Mikulincer, Florian and Tolmaz (1990). Another questionnaire composed by the researchers based on sociometric questionnaires in use within the IDF evaluating the soldiers’ leadership capacities, was administered to the soldiers’ peers and commanders enabling the research team to classify soldiers into leaders and non-leaders. It is not clear from the paper how many peers and commanders participated. They found that those perceived to be leaders had lower trait anxiety, a more internal locus of control, higher levels of self-efficacy and optimism, and ranked higher in secure attachment style.

These studies led by Popper are among the first empirical investigations of large samples of living participants (as opposed to biographical analysis) exploring the relationship between attachment style and aspects of leadership and as such, have considerable importance. Although Popper and colleagues took care to separate out the sources of evaluations of both leadership and attachment style, these studies have been conducted in the specific often intense and stressful context of the Israeli police or military so their results may not readily be generalisable. Despite the detail on steps taken to ascertain the reliability and validity of the instruments used in, for example,

Popper et al (2004), it is difficult critically to assess the reliability and validity of all the tools used in these studies to assess leadership and attachment style as many of the leadership scales used were composed for these particular studies and are not readily available.

Using similar research designs, further work by Popper's team has examined whether and how a leader's attachment style is associated with three leadership constructs (motives to lead, mental representations of the self as leader, and the ability to function as a security enhancing attachment figure) and with followers' performance and mental health in a group of three complex studies each with a sizeable number of participants, albeit mostly drawn from the IDF (Davidovitz et al, 2007). The 200 participants in the first study however were more widely drawn, including also 31 public sector managers and 85 private sector managers and had a relatively wider age span, from 26-58 years. There were 23 women in this study but none in the following two. In the first study, the participants completed self-report scales composed for this study to measure the leadership constructs above and the Experiences in Close Relationships inventory (ECR) said in the paper to be a frequently used measure of attachment-related avoidance and anxiety. It is not clear why this measure was used in this paper instead of the Attachment Style Questionnaire used in earlier papers. In the second study, participants were 549 male recruits aged 18-21 years in regular military service and 60 of their direct officers, aged 20-24 years. Rather than relying on self-report scales alone, experienced military officers were asked to complete the ECR and soldiers to report on the leadership style and efficacy of their officers. Soldiers were also asked to rate their own attachment style, their functioning on the military unit, and the cohesiveness of their unit. The third study was conducted at the beginning of a more intense period of combat training and was designed to probe soldiers' (n=541) appraisals of their officers' (n=72) role as a security provider. Baseline and subsequent measures of the soldiers' mental health were made as well as self-reports of attachments styles of both soldiers and officers.

All three studies confirm that leaders' attachment style is associated with leadership-related motives, self-representation and the willingness to serve as a supportive and caring leader. Individuals who are securely attached are more likely to emerge as leaders; they are motivated to gain leadership roles less by personal gain; and they

are more likely to delegate, trust and support those whom they lead. Leaders' attachment insecurities are associated with a personalized rather than a socialized leadership style, doubts on the part of leaders about their ability to perform in a leadership role, poorer ratings of their ability as leaders by their followers and poorer emotional and instrumental functioning of their followers. It should be noted that particularly with regard to mental representations of the self as a leader, the data gathered is a 'snap shot' at one particular time. Leaders, however, can learn and develop in their role in practice (Cunliffe and Wilson, 2017). Leaders' beliefs and mental representations about themselves as a leader therefore may change too.

In a similar vein, Popper and Amit (2009) found that secure attachment predicted the number of formative leadership experiences (in school, for example) mediated through lower trait anxiety and more openness to experience from their research using self-report questionnaires on attachment style, trait anxiety and openness to experience administered to 286 young soldiers within the IDF.

From the studies above and in theory-only papers, Popper and his colleagues suggest that a secure attachment style is associated with transformational leadership, a more socialized form of leadership, more positive outcomes in terms of followers' perceptions of leaders and follower functioning (Popper and Mayseless, 2003; Mayseless and Popper, 2007; Mayseless, 2010). In their recent review, Mayseless and Popper (2019) propose that leaders can provide a sense of attachment security and exploratory courage for their followers, as if they were attachment figures. They highlight the importance of the perception of the 'care' and 'competence' of leaders in the development of trust in them by followers.

## **4.2 Other studies on attachment and leadership**

Keller (2003) in the USA suggests a theoretical model using attachment theory as a framework to explore individual differences in implicit leadership theories (the mental schema of an individual ideal leader that guide the interpretation and behaviour of leadership behaviour). She proposes that early childhood experiences and subsequent attachment styles influence the expectations of leadership, of how both leaders and followers will conduct themselves and that there will be implications of

both congruent and incongruent attachment styles of each for the leader-follower interaction. While it is an interesting theoretical paper, it is not backed by empirical data; nor does Keller refer to factors other than attachment style that may influence implicit leadership theories.

In a study of 127 undergraduate management students in the North East USA, Berson, Dan and Yammarino (2006) explore the relationship between attachment style and views of ideal leadership and the degree to which individuals are perceived as emergent leaders in the workplace. Attachment style was classified again using the Hazan and Shaver classification (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Hazan and Shaver, 1990) while views of ideal leadership were collected via a Prototypicality Scale that the authors composed on the basis of work by Lord, Foti and De Vader (1984). They report on the steps they took to assure internal consistency of the four key implicit leadership attributes that became apparent: consideration; task orientation; sociability; non-leadership. Leader emergence was evaluated on the basis of asking students to rank others on 'dominance' within the team, the participants all having been asked to perform sets of individual and team tasks. It is however questionable whether dominance is the most appropriate assessment of leadership. The authors report that securely attached individuals were more likely to be seen as emergent leaders and to view ideal leadership as more considerate than ambivalent students and as more sociable than avoidant students.

A more recent study suggests that leaders' 'secure base support' (availability, encouragement, non-interference) positively predicts employees' proactive work behaviour (Wu and Parker, 2017). The researchers conducted two studies of employee-supervisor pairs: the first of 138 pairs from a range of organisations in North America recruited by an on-line survey company; the second of 212 'subordinates' and 77 supervisors (each rating 3-7 subordinates) from one energy company in China. A number of measures were used including of leader secure base support, adult attachment and proactive work behaviour. Wu and Parker's (2017) findings suggest that leader secure base support is a facilitator of proactive work behaviour through its promotion of 'self-efficacy' (particularly in employees high in attachment anxiety) and of 'autonomous motivation' (particularly in those high in attachment avoidance). The authors make no comment however about possible cross-cultural comparisons: the

propensity to form attachment relationships with leaders may vary according to culture (Mayseless and Popper, 2007).

### **4.3 Summary of studies on attachment theory and leadership**

In summary, the literature considering attachment theory within leadership studies is limited. That which there is mostly focuses on leadership in the workplace (including the military) or in higher education in cross-sectional studies with narrowly drawn samples in terms of age, gender and occupation. There is very little on attachment and political leadership (or indeed leadership in relation to geographical space or place, discussed later). Studies mostly explore the relationship between attachment styles and leader emergence and leadership styles, with more recent attention to the attachment styles of followers and how this may relate to their perceptions of leaders as well as the impact of leaders' attachment style on followers' well-being. Other than from Keller (2003), there is little theory or research on the joint, reciprocal effects of leader and follower attachment styles (Game, 2017). Furthermore, the current literature assumes a fixed attachment style that takes little account of either the context or the dynamics of a specific relationship. It should be stressed that attachment theory does not suggest a new theory of leadership per se (Game, 2017) but rather, it illuminates and complements established theory with a more finely grained understanding of the underlying propensity to relate and of subtle intricacies of how we develop our expectations of any relationship including that with a leader and with followers.

### **4.4. Attachment theory, leadership and wider considerations**

Feshbach (1991) suggests that there is a relationship between early attachments to caregivers and indices of nationalism and patriotism, having noted how commonly parental images are used with reference to a nation (for example, 'fatherland' and 'mother tongue'). In Feshbach's (1991) empirical study from the USA, he developed a measure distinguishing patriotism (here defined as love of country) from nationalism (here connoting a sense of national superiority and interest in national dominance) that was administered to 239 subjects from three groups: university students (n=194); high-school students (n=24; and an older group from an association of building



contractors (n=21). Each of the participants retrospectively reported their early attachments to caregivers by means of a questionnaire developed for this study. Feshbach finds a consistent positive relationship 'between father attachment and patriotism' in contrast to reported attachments to mothers. However, his measures of both early attachment and of patriotism and nationalism cannot easily be evaluated, and it is curious that he refers to 'greater' attachment or 'higher' attachment when most attachment theorists are clear that it is the style of attachment that is important: the 'strength' of attachment is not a recognisable measure. Moreover, the reliability of self-reported measures of attachment retrospectively is questionable. Feshbach's work is interesting in my view, less because of his results than because of the attempt to explore possible links between attachment theory and affective feelings towards the nation. It should be acknowledged however that there are likely to be many more factors that influence individuals' feelings towards their country than attachment patterns in childhood.

The relative absence of consideration of political leadership in the leadership literature about attachment theory is curious given that political leaders in western-type democracies are elected to represent their constituents and thus explicitly have a relationship with them. Mayseless and Popper (2007) have however theoretically explored the nature of the relationship between individuals, leaders and the groups and societies to which they belong. They argue that while a full-blown attachment bond is not necessarily formed, the reliance of individuals on leaders and social institutions reflects the '*dynamics of attachment*' (p. 73), thus proposing an extension of the notions of attachment processes that individuals engage in to maintain a sense of security. Mayseless and Popper (2007) contend that the relationship that individuals have with leaders such as political leaders whom they rarely meet is created and maintained via symbolic means. That is, individuals' hold expectations about leaders that, if leaders fulfil, promote a sense of security and reassurance on the part of individuals. This might be seen most obviously at times of national crisis, exemplified by how Winston Churchill, then British Prime Minister, has been seen during the Second World War. While Mayseless and Popper (2007: p.73) suggest that '*these dynamics do not necessitate the existence of a full-blown attachment bond*', they do not tease out further what distinctions there may be between the two. It is notable that Bowlby (1997: p.207) himself wrote of how,

*'A school or college, a work group, a religious group or a political group can come to constitute for many people a subordinate attachment- 'figure', and for some people a principal attachment 'figure'. In such cases, it seems probable, the development to attachment to a group is mediated, at least initially, by attachment to a person holding a prominent position within that group'.*

Mayseless and Popper (2007) suggest that in some circumstances, individuals imbue social institutions with attachment functions, that is, that the goal in adulthood remains the obtaining or the maintenance of a sense of security. This may be derived not only from intimate others but also from others including social institutions such as a community or church group who are perceived to offer a secure haven and protection - and God (Kirkpatrick, 1992). Mayseless and Popper (2007) explore a potentially rich seam to which my work, in small part, is intended to contribute.

In this section above on attachment theory and leadership, I have detailed and analysed the limited literature because understanding links between attachment theory and (political) leadership are at the heart of my work. Furthermore, the detail provided demonstrates how my work offers a very different perspective on these links. Rather than examining the relationship between attachment styles and leader emergence, leadership styles, attachment styles of followers, and followers' well-being, my research instead explores the relationship between politicians and their elected political role and its possible implications, and the relationship between political leadership and place. It is appropriate therefore now to turn to the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin my work.

#### **4.5 Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

Finally, in this section I reflect first on the ontological assumptions and then on the epistemological assumptions that underlie my research in order to provide some clarity about the basis on which I approached my scholarly work. I do not align myself definitively with either one of the two better known ontological approaches – positivist or naturalist and constructivist (Elgie, 2015; Moses and Knutsen, 2019) – perhaps echoing my own professional background. The implicit assumption in much of medical

training is that there is a 'real world' of, for example, anatomy, physiology and biochemistry, that if only we could discover more about, illness and suffering could be alleviated or overcome. This may apply more (but still not completely) to say, orthopaedics than in psychiatry where there has, for example, been long debate about the nature of diagnosis and the extent to which diagnoses may become unhelpfully reified (Clare, 1976); and particularly in my own speciality of child liaison psychiatry whose richness in my view owes much to the usefulness of integrating a biological understanding (often but not inevitably, from a positivist perspective) with an (often but not always more constructivist) psychological and social understanding - in different ways at different times for different children and their families. Whether or not one has elucidated 'the truth' of a difficulty – or a diagnosis in many cases – may be less important from (my) clinical perspective than whether or not it is useful for the child and family. On the other hand, there are times when diagnosis in psychiatry is useful – bringing relief sometimes to an individual or for research purposes (as long the limitations of diagnosis are held firmly in mind). As a systemic family therapist, I bring my training and experience, inevitably socially constructed, to an encounter with a family who brings their own expertise and stories to what is identified as a problem and, whatever 'the truth', together, we 'co-construct' a new and more useful story that allows the child and/ or family to move on (Dallos and Draper, 2010). But in any case, Moses and Knutsen (2019: 14), argue that the best scholarship in social science *'draws from both halves of the methodological walnut: good work in the naturalist tradition must be sensitive to constructivist concerns, and vice-versa'*. I realise that I am drawn to the 'scientific realist' or 'critical realist' position in which there is an assumption that there is a 'real world' out there which is open to investigation even we cannot necessarily be aware of causal factors in that world (Elgie, 2015). Elgie (2015) sees scientific realism as a distinct philosophical position in contrast to Moses and Knutsen (2019) who argue that it is less a synthesis of naturalist and constructivist traditions but instead a means of avoiding the irreconcilable ontologies of the two major traditions.

This understanding has been important in my PhD work even though I had not begun my social science research with any explicit ontological assumptions. I was simply intrigued to understand more about the experiences of politicians as they left office. As much as I might have thought that there may be some patterns to the experiences

of former political leaders – and the need to map and explain patterns is recognised by both naturalist and constructivist traditions - I had initially assumed that any such patterns would have been dependent on context(s), ideas, values as well as individual personalities. Perhaps surprisingly, I had no thought at the time that I would come to find attachment theory useful here, as in my clinical work. But Marris's (1993) insights, drawn from attachment theory, on the disruption to meaning from loss and change struck a resonant chord as I tried to make sense of my findings. From an initial focus on individual political leaders, my interest shifted to political leadership – a relational process with constituents – and to the internalised relationship that former politicians had had with their role. From an ontological point of view, politicians *are* elected by voters who *do* cast their votes even if our understanding of the complex processes by which voters come to decide for whom and why they will vote is limited, let alone our understanding of the complexity of the relationships that politicians develop both in and with their role.

Attachment theory is of course just a theory. It does not 'exist' in a physical sense. Bowlby built up the theory by induction in order to make sense of his repeated observations of what appeared to be a consistent pattern of emotional and behavioural difficulties in children separated long term from their mothers and the behaviour of children temporarily separated from their mothers. It is a relational theory – its essence is about how humans relate to one another, in part, developed from their relationships in the earliest years.

Scientific realists may share, in part, a basic ontological realism with naturalists but they adopt a more sceptical epistemological stance (Elgie, 2015). Our knowledge of the world is likely to be imperfect (Elgie, 2015), whatever tools we use. From an epistemological perspective in considering attachment theory, a variety of means have been employed: observation of behaviour, surveys, questionnaires and interviews but even standardised tools that are described as reliable and well-validated, for example the Strange Situation Test and the Adult Attachment Interview, are not direct measures of 'attachment': the quality of an attachment relationship is, inevitably imperfectly, inferred from behaviour. On the other hand, repeated empirical investigations in many different cultures (and species) support the basic tenets of the theory, enhancing its robustness. Attachment theory provides a helpful understanding of the powerful need

to belong and of emotional regulation within relationships. How could it not therefore provide useful insights into the relational process of leadership?

## **5. Publications in support of a PhD by Published Works**

The publications which I list in this text in support of my application for a PhD by Published Works are drawn on two empirical research projects. I shall describe the methodology of the projects later but in summary, the first study explored the experience of the transition from elected political office of former political leaders - Members of the Westminster Parliament and major council leaders in England. The second investigated the early leadership of the first six metro-mayors of the new combined authorities in England, from a perspective of the leadership of place. From my research, I have had one monograph, three peer-reviewed journal papers and three chapters published (or in press) since 2017 while I have been working as Research Fellow in Public Leadership at The Open University Business School:

- (i) Roberts, J. (2017) *Losing Political Office*, London: Palgrave Macmillan;
- (ii) Roberts, J. (2019). Exiting the Political Stage: Exploring the Impact on Representative Democracy, *British Politics*, 14: 391-407;
- (iii) Roberts, J. (2019). The Under-Appreciated Loss of Political Office, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 24(8):706-720;
- (iv) Roberts, J. (2020) 'The Leadership of Place and People in the new English Combined Authorities'. *Local Government Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2020.1719076;
- (v) Roberts, J. (2019). *Rethinking Civic Roles*. In (ed.) H. Tam, *Whose Government Is It?* Bristol: Policy Press;
- (vi) Roberts, J. (2020). The Power of Place in the Exercise of Leadership. In (Eds.) B. Neilsen and S. MacCabe, *The English Regions Post-Brexit*. Goring-on-Thames: Bite-Sized Books;

- (vii) Roberts, J. (in press). *After the Party is Over*. In (Ed.) A. Weinberg, *Psychology of Democracy: Of the people, by the people, for the people*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

I can also offer an initial summary report from the first research project, published by the Open University:

- (viii) Roberts, Jane (2015). *Losing Political Office*. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

## **6. Summary of the publications**

### **6.1 Monograph**

**Roberts, J. (2017) *Losing Political Office*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.**

The monograph was published by the highly respected academic publisher, Palgrave Macmillan in 2017 and it is the most comprehensive academic output from my research undertaken with considerable detail (271 pages) about the background to the research, a detailed literature review, methodology, and the findings and analysis and interpretation of those findings. It was intended to be read by academics in the fields of leadership, political science, psychology, public management and administration as well as current and former elected politicians, policy makers, informed commentators and the general reader.

I focused on the losing of political office and make clear how this loss is distinguished from the loss of other roles by a combination of factors including:

- The highly demanding nature of the work in a number of different arenas that is not confined to normal hours of work and intrudes upon family life;

- The attraction of politics for many is all-consuming, not only of time but of identity and deeply held beliefs;
- Public expectations of their elected representatives are higher now than they have ever been;
- Continuous media scrutiny, possible public exposure and often derogatory comments on social media;
- The precarious nature of the role for many, with a sudden loss of office possible through de-selection or defeat;
- Fewer opportunities to seek a similar role elsewhere as may be possible for senior managers in other occupations;
- Unlike many others facing redundancy or retirement, there is little provided in the way of support for the transition of leaving office;
- Finally, elected politicians represent their constituents and necessarily have a relationship with them: the leaving of office is not then just a private affair. They cannot help but be the recipient of a range of emotions projected on to them by others.

The monograph explores the experience of the transition from political office drawing on empirical research during which I carried out 41 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with politicians who had left office, either having been defeated or having chosen not to stand again (and their partners were possible), and with current politicians about their thinking on their own future exit from office. Elite interviews are often hard to obtain and the sensitivity of the topic itself could have discouraged some volunteers – but in fact the opposite was true – but the engagement in both numbers and candidness within the interviews was remarkable. The number of participants - 41 – in what often turned out to be longer interviews than originally sought (at their behest) is notable given sensitive nature of the research. It should be noted that the response rate from politicians was remarkably high: only one former politician declined my request and one did not reply; and one current politician declined my invitation and two MPs did not respond.

The research asked five questions:

- What is the experience of losing elected office for the office-holder?
- What are the consequences of the loss of political office on individuals and their families?
- What, if anything, could be done to mitigate the consequences?
- What can current politicians tell us about the period prior to exit and how the matter is (or is not) approached while in office?
- Are there any wider implications from the information gathered for our democratic system?

## **Research design**

This was a flexibly designed, qualitative study that allowed for some modification of the design of the study as it progressed. It was envisaged, for example, that there might be some change to specific questions and prompts both within any one interview in response to what was being brought up at the time by the interviewee.

The focus was UK MPs in the Westminster Parliament and council leaders of unitary or county authorities because of the relative lack of attention to politicians exiting office at these two levels of governance.

I recruited three groups of politicians or ex-politicians:

- Ten former MPs and council leaders who had chosen to stand down from political office (in other words their leaving office was voluntary);
- Ten former MPs and council leaders who had been defeated electorally (in other words their leaving office was involuntary); and
- Ten current MPs, council leaders and directly elected mayors (to provide insights into whether and how they thought about and prepared for leaving office at some point in the future).

Given that directly elected mayors were a relatively recent introduction to local government political structures, very few had then left office; including any former directly elected mayors, therefore, might have compromised confidentiality. I only



sought, therefore, to include directly elected mayors in my group of current politicians. In addition, I interviewed:

- The partners of those in the first two groups where possible. This was important as it gave a perspective on losing office beyond self-report.

Sampling was designed to ensure that former and current politicians came from all three (at the time) main political parties and that they had represented geographically diverse constituencies. Some MPs had been ministers, in either a junior or a senior position, while others had remained on the backbenches. By design, all the MPs interviewed had to have lost office at the 2010 General Election to ensure that the experience was still fairly recent. Former council leaders were selected for the study where they had lost both their leadership position and their seat. This ensured they had fully lost office. Very few council leaders had lost their position and seat in 2010, and therefore the span of years was widened, from 2008 to 2012. Only two of those contacted declined to participate (one former MP and one current MP), and three others did not reply (one former leader and two current MPs). Permission to contact a partner and their contact details were sought from each interviewee.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 41 participants. The two groups of former politicians, 20 in total, included council leaders who had left office at different times in the four-year period 2008 to 2012, but half had left in 2011. The time that had elapsed between their leaving office and my interview ranged from 12 months to just under four years, with most interviewed between 12 and 18 months after they had left office. All the former MPs were interviewed about two years after they had left office following the May 2010 General Election. Eleven partners were interviewed: not all of the former politicians were currently with the partner that they had had at the time of leaving political office, and some did not wish to be interviewed.

All but one of the council leaders interviewed had undertaken the role on a full-time basis with no other paid employment; this is not a requirement of the post, although it is expected of directly elected mayors.

The ten current politicians interviewed had been elected to their current position for widely varying times, from two to over 30 years. They were interviewed over a period from the end of 2013 to May 2014. In addition to questions about their experience of holding office, interviewees were asked about how long they were thinking of seeking to remain in office, the factors that influenced their thinking, and what they may have learnt from seeing colleagues move on from elected office.

All interviews were audio-recorded at a location chosen by the interviewee. A thematic analysis of the fully transcribed interviews was undertaken. Some themes flowed naturally from the design of the interview protocol (e.g. the decision to stand down, the facts of what had happened at the time of the election and immediate reactions to election defeat) but others emerged from close attention to the data. I approached the analysis of the data as follows:

- I initially thoroughly read all the interview transcripts several times until I became very acquainted with their detail. Certain themes emerged, for example, the way in which those who planned to stand down had marked their transition from office (or sometimes not);
- Having developed a group of themes from both the interview protocol and the transcripts, I went back over all the interviews, scrutinizing them in detail to identify and document everything that pertained to these themes;
- I reviewed the transcripts again, attempting to stand back and identify anything in the interviews that I had missed or where I might have given undue weight – too much or too little – to any particular passages, or where I might have introduced any misinterpretations or distortions to the data. I recognised that it can be easy to give too little bearing to data that is relatively moderate and neutral.

All of these interviews were non-attributable and care was taken to avoid any means by which the individuals could be identified.

The findings are analysed thematically from a psychological and a sociological perspective: attachment theory, mourning and grief on the one hand; and role exit on the other.

## (ii) The key findings

Most interviewees – whether they had chosen to go or not – had grieved the loss of political office in some way, often intensely. In adjusting to a very different life, most had experienced a sense of dislocation. They had initially struggled to find a new narrative about who they were and what they did, and a number had struggled to find employment. Many of those who had been defeated at the ballot box described emotional devastation and a profound sense of personal failure at the loss of their position at the time of the defeat. For a number, this was still the case when I interviewed them well over a year later. Many who had been defeated – and especially their partners – felt deeply hurt and angry at the thoughtlessness of the political parties that they had served so loyally, often over many decades. There had often been little or no acknowledgement from the party of their tireless contribution over the years. They had simply been cast out. They lamented that their skills, knowledge and experience had not been made use of, and they conveyed a deep sense of frustration that there was so little interest in what they still had to offer.

A small number of interviewees, all MPs who had stood down, had been relieved to leave office, finding the role increasingly unattractive and wanting a more fulfilling professional and personal life elsewhere.

From my interviews, it was clear that current politicians mostly had given little thought to when and how they might leave political office. MPs, by and large, were reluctant to think about it. Council leaders tend to be in office for a shorter time than MPs, but, even so, few had given much thought to when and how they might leave it.

Stories are often powerful. There are many powerful narratives in this research: about the experiences of holding political office; about how carelessly dismissed the individuals feel on leaving that office; and about how what former office holders may still have to offer is so little recognised in both the academic literature and more widely.

The monograph continues with a chapter that considers the factors that might help or hinder the adjustment from political office with recommendations on what practically can be done to mitigate the adverse effects of leaving political office - by the individuals concerned and their families but also by employers, Parliament, local government, political parties and by us all as citizens.

In addition to the initial research, the monograph includes a chapter from 'on the record' interviews I conducted with five named MPs from each of the main parties (Lord David Blunkett, Jo Swinson, Sir Vince Cable, Sir James Paice and Paul Burstow) who had stood down or been defeated at the 2015 General Election. I had asked each of them to reflect on my 2015 report in the light of their own experience of losing political office and their observations of their former colleagues.

The monograph probes the human experience of the transition from political office both for the individuals concerned and for their partners. It begins with a predominantly psychological perspective, drawing on theories on attachment, loss and grief, before considering the wider implications of political exit for representative democracy from a political perspective. I argue that many politicians have a bond of attachment with their role – their political office encompasses important values and deeply cherished beliefs as well as, for many, an identity, a way of life, status and social networks – that when disrupted, leads to distress that is akin to grief. While some distress in such circumstances is inevitable, I make practical suggestions about how individuals, families and institutions could mitigate the difficulties in the transition from office.

Furthermore, I suggest that not only do we do a disservice to those who leave political office and their families, but we do ourselves a disservice by failing to make use of their valuable skills and experience. Set in context of profound cynicism and disengagement with 'the political class', the monograph goes on to explore the wider implications for how political exit is managed for representative democracy. Offering the idea of 'political fluidity', I suggest that for a healthy, sustainable democracy, the route into and out of political office should be less problematic and more fluid, resonating with elements of classical democratic theory of the relationship between 'rulers' and the 'ruled' and ideas about 'democratic rotation.'

## 6.2 Journal papers

The two journal papers on the loss of political office build upon the research and the monograph. One, published in *British Politics*, focuses on the possible implications of the manner of transition from political office on wider representative democracy with particular reference to the UK context. The second was published in the *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, a journal that focuses on loss of different types.

### **6.2.1 Roberts, J. (2019). *Exiting the Political Stage: Exploring the Impact on Representative Democracy*, *British Politics* 14: 391-407.**

This journal paper uses the research evidence from politicians losing political office to develop further the argument that the problematic nature of the experience for many of losing political office has significant implications for representative democracy. Some potential candidates may be dissuaded to stand for office in the first place, given the risks involved, and others currently in office may outstay their welcome. From exploring ideas about a 'political class', a 'political elite' and 'the professionalisation of politics', the paper draws on ideas about 'democratic rotation' from Ancient Greece. The principle of 'democratic rotation' was crucial to Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between citizens of Athens (albeit restricted to men) and rulers, that is, the importance of both ruling and being ruled in turn. Rotation in office permitted more opportunity to serve in public office and thus enhance understanding of the public responsibilities of office more widely across the population. As then, I argue that any modern healthy system of representative democracy depends on a reasonable degree of 'fluidity' between those who are elected to serve in political office and those whom they represent. That is, citizens should have a reasonable chance of gaining positions of elected political leadership should they be able and motivated to do so, and not be precluded from seeking office by disproportionate risks that might be encountered through gaining, holding or leaving political office. However, in order for some to gain such office for the first time, others must leave, often an unappealing prospect to those already in office. Limiting terms, seen particularly in the USA (Petracca 1992), has been seen both as a check on excessive power – a preoccupation of political philosophers – *and* an opportunity to enhance political participation. In parliamentary

democracies where there is less separation between the executive and the legislature, term limits are more problematic (Riddell, 1995).

While there is a balance to be struck between the usefulness of the experience gained in political office and the fresh perspective from recently elected politicians, diminishing the fluidity of access into and out of political office has costs for citizens. By having the widest possible range of people to stand for political office, the opportunity for the fullest expression of political citizenship is extended; and with more people having experienced political office, understanding of and confidence in political leadership is enhanced, reminiscent of de Toqueville's notion of using '*Democracy to moderate Democracy*' (quoted in Wren, 2007, p.212).

This paper was published in a journal within the discipline of politics in contrast to the second paper that was published in a journal interested in loss and trauma.

**6.2.2 Roberts, J. (2019). The Under-Appreciated Loss of Political Office, *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 24(8): 706-720.**

This journal paper considers more the personal experience of political exit, drawing on some examples from the USA as well as the UK, and the experience of loss and grief in the context of the workplace. It highlights the difficulties that leaders in any sector may experience as they relinquish the '*essential nutrients*' (Kets de Vries, 2003: p.2003) of power and influence, instead potentially to face '*the experience of nothingness*' (Kets de Vries, 2003: p.711). Given the intensity of the demands of a political leadership role and the degree to which a politician's dearly held values and beliefs, social networks, sense of purpose and identity are often deeply entwined with the role, the transition from leadership roles may be even harder for politicians. I argue that it is the breaking of the bond of attachment to the political office that leads to distress, or at the very least, 'discombobulation', as one of my research interviewees described it. That this psychological mechanism derived from attachment theory has a biological underpinning is underlined by reference to the work of the zoologist Franz de Waal who graphically describes the prolonged distress of an alpha male

chimpanzee who lost his leadership role. De Waal observes how '*Evolution has instilled a need to belong and to feel accepted*' (de Waal, 2006, p.50).

**6.2.3 Roberts, J. (2020) 'The Leadership of Place and People in the new English Combined Authorities'. *Local Government Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2020.1719076**

This paper is one of the earliest to generate an understanding and shape the academic perspectives on the newly established political leadership role of 'metro-mayor' of English combined authorities, how the first metro-mayors were approaching their role in their early days in terms of how place was construed within the combined authority, and how the metro-mayors exercised leadership of place. It reviews the historical context of English local government and the more proximate factors that have led to the creation of the combined authorities, including the place of 'place'. It then examines the approach to political leadership of the metro-mayors first elected, drawing on the empirical work undertaken and on leadership theory, including place leadership, and institutional formation.

At the core of the paper is a series of 33 interviews I conducted with senior politicians within current combined authorities, senior local and central government officials and other informed commentators. As well as considering the merits and demerits of a directly elected metro-mayor, interviews probed how combined authority leaders understood the place that they represented, how they exercised leadership of place, and how they worked with others exercising leadership of place (in other agencies). Place featured strongly in interviews with both metro-mayors (and council leaders): they relayed powerful stories of the place with pride, passion and a sense of personal identity.

The paper draws on research evidence from interviews and documents to illustrate that place has featured little in central government thinking about devolution even if the legislation in 2009 that paved the way for combined authorities additionally required that a combined authority should '*reflect the identities and interests of local communities*' (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2009: p. 72). Given the affective bond for many people with their place(s) (Nicholson, 1996; Fried,

2000), I go on to suggest that political leaders can draw on that bond to pull people together into a shared social identity (Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2011) of the place, that speaks to their values and mobilises collective agency (Horlings, Roep and Wellbrock, 2018).

I demonstrate both the commonalities and the differences between the early leadership of the first mayoral combined authorities arising from their context, both national and local, and the actors (past and present) working within them. The context of local political leadership is inevitably multi-layered from the geography, socio-economics and culture of the place, and the (varied) constitutions of the combined authorities through to wider national and international pressures. My findings underscore how actors are constrained through the rules, practices and narratives, formal and informal, of institutions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) but also how the (very different degrees of) agency of the combined authorities' political leadership has played a significant part in their evolution to date. As Lowndes (2005) puts it, institutions and individuals are mutually constitutive. My conclusions help scope key questions for policymakers around the development of combined authorities and their mayors within the wider governance landscape with a focus on place and its importance to people. This is particularly pertinent in current political times where there is much debate about the merits of devolution and in terms of stark differences in voting patterns in England between large metropolitan areas and towns/ rural areas. With the UK having left the European Union, there are threats to the integrity of the United Kingdom that could potentially leave England, with or without Wales, as a single entity that could lead to a more fundamental re-examination of the governance of both countries.

### **6.3 Chapters**

Two chapters draw on my research on losing political office but each has a different angle and a third chapter is drawn from my work on place and the leadership of the English combined authorities



### **6.3.1 Roberts, J. (2019). *Rethinking Civic Roles*. In (ed.) H. Tam, *Whose Government Is It?* Bristol: Policy Press**

Against a background of growing disenchantment with and disengagement from a political class that is seen to be distant from the lives of ordinary people that elected representatives are elected to represent (Riddell, 1995; Coleman, 2005), this chapter considers two aspects of how the divide between elected representative and citizen might be tackled. It first examines how the relationship between the two could be improved and then how there could be more fluidity across the two, with a less restrictive and problematic path into and out of elected office. The chapter therefore draws on my research on losing political office but in addition, it extends to a consideration of political leadership more widely and in particular the importance of the quality and characteristics of the relationship between effective political leaders and those whom they represent.

Given that representative politics needs to be understood as a more active exchange between citizen and representative' (Stoker, 2006: p 15), I emphasise how political leadership is about a relationship between politician and citizen and both will have responsibilities within such a relationship. I propose that elected representatives could usefully follow certain principles (such as responsiveness to citizens, openness to participation by others, the hearing of dissenting voices, the encouragement of political efficacy or agency, and the nurturing of continuing relationships) in terms of both *what* they do and, equally importantly, *how* they act. These principles may seem blindingly obvious and straightforward – but they are not always adhered to. Drawing on my understanding of attachment theory and my experience as a practitioner as a local politician and a clinician, the chapter argues that the responsiveness of political leaders to citizens is key and gives a range of examples of good (and not so good) practice. While I do not draw any parallels the chapter between the relationship between child and care-giver and the relationship between leader and 'follower', I acknowledge in this text that the importance that I assign to the responsiveness of political leaders is drawn from my understanding of attachment theory and the key elements of how individuals come to feel valued and motivated.

**6.3.2 Roberts, J. (2020). The Power of Place in the Exercise of Leadership. In (Eds.) B. Neilsen and S. MacCabe, *The English Regions Post-Brexit*. Goring-on-Thames: Bite-Sized Books.**

This chapter was requested following the publication of my paper in *Local Government Studies* on the leadership of the English combined authorities. It has been published in a series of essays in *The English Regions Post-Brexit*. It draws on my research on the leadership of metro-mayors in the new combined authorities particularly with regard to place. I draw on ideas from attachment theory, attachment to place, and social identity theory in order to argue that place has a more fundamental importance in most people's lives than has been recognised in academic and policy debates on leadership, governance and devolution. The chapter argues that despite the inevitable differences between individuals in any place, there will be some commonalities on which a political leader can draw in order to mobilise people towards a common endeavour. According to Grint (2001), leadership involves the art of articulating a group's identity, framing a narrative of who they are, their origins as well as their future direction. As Jackson (2019: p.213) puts it, place can provide '*a powerful strategic resource as the basis for forging a common identity, purpose and direction*'. By virtue of being within any given group, some social identity is shared. And leadership, as proposed by Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011), is about shaping social identity. I suggest that place constitutes a social group, albeit one that may be loosely defined. Political leaders in most representative democracies are elected on the basis of place and hence they can use the power of that place to identify a 'we' of which they are 'prototypical'. Those leaders who are steeped in their area understand more intimately and authentically the richness and subtle distinctiveness of, and distinctions within, their place in order to build collective agency. The essay is essentially a plea for the recognition of the power of place for effective political leadership and for thinking about devolution in England.

**6.3.3 Roberts, J. (in press). *After the Party is Over*. In (Ed.) A. Weinberg, *Psychology of Democracy: Of the people, by the people, for the people*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

This chapter for a book edited by Dr Ashley Weinberg at Salford University to be published by a leading academic publisher has been submitted and accepted. It includes up-to-date new references as well as consideration of the results of the 2019 General Election. Its content focuses on the human experience of the transition from office but makes clear that there can be wider implications for democracy from inattention to the potentially problematic nature of the transition.

Taking on board ideas about classical Athenian ideas about democratic rotation, as explained above, I argue that in the absence of a reasonable degree of what I term, 'political fluidity', representative democracy is diminished because it reinforces the perception of a political class separate from the rest of the population; it may differentially exclude some groups who may otherwise come forward to serve in elected office; and with prolonged incumbency, there are fewer opportunities for citizens to be able to represent others. Political participation itself has long been seen as an important element in sustaining a healthy democracy: de Tocqueville maintained that participation in public affairs drew members of a community away from narrow self-interest and into a wider appreciation of co-operative endeavour thus re-invigorating civic virtue (Wren, 2007).

A more fluid system of political representation, with individuals serving time in elected office and then leaving with reasonable structures of support in place, increases the opportunity for a wider range of people to put themselves forward for election and facilitates a wider understanding of the challenges of political office. If the difficulties of gaining political office, holding that office and leaving political office are too great, the group of people who are able and motivated to stand to as representatives will be narrowed (King, 2015). Some individuals may be affected disproportionately, for example, those from professions such as medicine or academia, where an absence of some years and a lack of professional practice may make a return problematic.

If the professionalisation of MPs (Cairney, 2007) continues - with local government leadership hastening unchecked in the same direction – I suggest that there is a compelling argument that the support available on exit to any professional losing their job should be available to elected representatives. Furthermore, that if political exit were managed more gracefully as part of a broader appreciation of the importance of fluidity in political representation, representative democracy might be enhanced. Crafting ‘*a politics of retreat*’ (Keane, 2011, p.283) - in which the transition from political office is thought about, talked about and better managed – would bring benefits not just to individual politicians and their families but also to representative democracy.

## **7. Outline of the Interrelationship between the publications**

I have approached potential links between political leadership and attachment from a different perspective from that of academics in Israel and the USA investigating the links between attachment theory and leadership, detailed earlier. While they show that people with different attachments styles may have a different propensity to emerge as leaders and may exercise their leadership differently, I link attachment theory in a different and highly original way. I conducted two research projects: one, an exploration of the path from political leadership and the loss of political office; and the other, on the leadership of place. Underlying both is the importance of bonds of attachment and the fundamental human need to belong, usefully understood in attachment theory to have its origins in biological and evolutionary terms.

On the one hand, I suggest that there may be a bond between an individual politician to their political office and what it represents, and on the other hand, I suggest that the attachment that many people have for place can also be considered as akin to an attachment bond. My propositions draw on and extend Bowlby’s (1997: p.207) argument, quoted earlier, that ‘...*a political group can come to constitute for many people a subordinate attachment “figure,” and for some people a “principal attachment figure”*’. It might be argued that the bond I propose between politician and their office and the bond between people and their place(s) do not strictly amount to an attachment bond given that the proposed bond is not with a person, as Stevenson-Hinde (2007) insists it must be, and in the light of Cassidy’s (2018) distinction of an attachment bond within the larger class of affectional bonds as one in which an

individual seeks comfort from an attachment figure at times of distress. On the other hand, there is evidence, quoted above, that Bowlby recognised that schools, workplace and political groups *can* come be considered as an attachment figure, and there is evidence from my research and elsewhere (Riddell, 1995, for example) of politicians seeking to cling on to office, that is, seeking comfort from proximity to political office. When these bonds are disrupted – either by the loss of political office or by, say, forced removal from a place (Marris, 1993), intense distress, grief and the loss of an individual's assumptive world (Murray Parkes, 1971) can be the consequence. In each case, the disruption of the bonds to office and to place seem to reflect '*the dynamics of attachment*' (Mayseless and Popper, 2007: p.73).

I have demonstrated the often deeply cherished attachment to an elected political role that can makes its loss – the rupture of the bond of attachment – problematic. That that the path from elected office can be so steep may deter some people from standing in the first place and once in office, the leaving of it may be resisted (through clinging to political office) which, I argue above, is to the wider detriment of a system of representative democracy. While there is evidence of a grief reaction to the loss of any valued job or role (Vickers, 2009), I argue, as detailed in section 6.1 above, that the nature of political office and the leaving of it, is distinctive. The distress that may be associated with the loss of political office is therefore compounded.

Secondly, my research underscores the importance of the attachment that people have for their place(s) and how the human need to belong can be harnessed by political leaders, a need that Lammy (2020) and Worpole (2021) have recently echoed. Most people have a sense of rootedness to where they live and a sense of attachment to places (Nicolson, 1996; Fried, 2000) as I detail later. In his dismay at the withering of spatial identities, Collier, an economist, suggests that '*one reason to be hopeful is that place based identity is one of the traits that are hard-wired deep in our psyche by evolution*' (Collier, 2018 p.66). Not coming from a background in psychology, Collier however makes no reference to attachment theory.

Effective political leaders, I suggest, are seen to represent, perhaps even embody, something about a place that can draw people together. Place then can be seen as a social group in social identity theory terms and a potential 'in-group'. While social

identity theory assumes that individuals depend on groups for esteem, value and identity (Smith, Murphy and Coats, 1999), I suggest that attachment theory gives a much richer account of the origin and processes of the powerful human need to belong and its place in human development. In thinking about place and political leadership, however, social identity theory can usefully illuminate the means by which a leader can articulate and shape a group identity based on place. With the diversity of interests and communities within any one place, an appeal to the commonality of the place represented by the political leader could be powerful in shaping the 'we' of the social group (the 'in-group'). Indeed, Andy Burnham, the metro-mayor of Greater Manchester, in the autumn of 2020 during the COVID pandemic provides an instructive example as he speaks out on behalf of Greater Manchester and 'the North' – the 'we', the in-group - against the Government based in London. Notably, Schulte-Cloos and Bauer (2021) have demonstrated that the well documented voters' preference for local candidates is, in part, explained as an expression of voters' place based social identity. Worpole (2021: p.51) contends that *'Attachment to place is the latest terrain on which culture wars are about to be fought ... most people remain loyal to their home territory and take pride in it, whatever outsiders say. Attachment to place often over-rides race, class or other identity attachments.'*

In essence, my published works have at their core an understanding of the profound importance to political leadership of the need to belong, understood from attachment theory to be a fundamental human need.

## **8. Critical review of the literature on leaving political office, place attachment and place leadership**

This critical review covers both literature on the topics of leaving political office and on place attachment and place leadership. While the literature is sourced from different disciplines, as the introduction of this paper demonstrates, the theme of attachment and 'the making and breaking of affectional bonds', the title of a collection of essays by John Bowlby (2005) underlies my interest in both.

Political exit is a research area where relatively little has been written and where my own work has received considerable interest from academics and practitioners. The

area is said to be, '*under-theorized, under-researched, under-appreciated and – in many cases – under-regulated.*' (Keane, 2011).

Most of the literature on place and attachment to place is found within geography, and environmental psychology, quite separate from that about place leadership within leadership studies. Indeed, Mabey and Freeman (2010) suggest that place leadership is a sub-discipline in its own right. I will focus on the limited literature on the links between place attachment and attachment theory, and to some illustrative literature on place leadership, demonstrating the lack of attention to the sense of place that people have for where they live.

## **8.1 Leaving Political Office**

### **8.1.1. The transition from office and what happens next**

Research on what happens after leaving a political leadership role began in 1925 in the United States (Sheldon, 1925 cited in Theakston, 2010) with an exploration on the lives of US Presidents after they had left the White House. It was not until the end of the century that there was any consideration of the after-life of Prime Ministers in the United Kingdom (Just, 1994) and later still on heads of government in other Western-style democracies (Theakston, 2010; Theakston and de Vries, 2012). My monograph reviews this literature in detail.

Proceeding further down the political hierarchy, through the world of front- and backbench parliamentarians and of politicians at a provincial, state or municipal level, there is progressively little literature on either the experience of leaving office or of what happens subsequently. The most high-ranking MPs may write memoirs or be the subject of biographical accounts but these rarely dwell on their departure from office. In this paper, I shall restrict the critical review of the literature to the loss of elected political office within federal and state legislative bodies. Notably, I have not been able to find any literature, other than my own, on the experience of the loss of leadership within local government.

There has been extensive work on areas such as the career paths of politicians in various legislatures, on recruitment of candidates, the determinants of turnover in the US Congress, in state legislatures, on the broad motivations of politicians, on leadership succession and some of the factors leading to a decision to quit (for example, Blair and Henry, 1981; Hibbing, 1982; Francis and Baker, 1986; Matland and Studlar, 2004; Mattozzi and Merlo, 2007; Bynander and 't Hart, 2008; Cristofoli and Crugnola, 2012; Keane and Merlo, 2010; Kerby and Blidook, 2011; Karol, D, 2012; Wurfel, 2018; Raymond and Overby, 2019; Helms, 2020). Even death in the US Congress has been the focus of study (Maltzman, Sigelman and Binder, 1996). While works such as these have some relevance to my research, this review focuses specifically on the experience of transition from office and what happens subsequently to former office holders. Here there is considerably less work.

**North America** and the **United Kingdom** have provided the most fertile ground for considering what happens to former political office holders at a parliamentary level:

### **From Canada**

Doherty (2001) sought to determine the types of experiences that Members of Parliament faced both in office and after leaving public life. The Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians (CAFP) sent surveys to over 850 former members of both the Senate and House of Commons. Questions probe former members' experience of their time in office, the costs to their quality of life of being in office, and life after office. The paper states that over 200 completed surveys were returned - the precise number is not stated - but the author writes that the response rate was 'just over' 25%. Doherty distinguishes between those who had left office voluntarily (69) and those who had been defeated at the ballot box (98). It is not clear from his paper, however, what had happened to the 33 or so who are not accounted for in these figures.

The results demonstrate that this was a group of former members who had been very dedicated to public service but for whom the personal and family costs had been high. Most former members in the survey were relatively satisfied with their transition from elected life to post-elected life: 83% responded that transition had been '*somewhat*' or



'very' successful. This high overall figure masked a cohort, albeit a small minority, who had experienced considerable problems. The most vulnerable group was those who had been electorally defeated, especially if they had served only one term and therefore had no parliamentary pension. This tends generally to be a numerically significant group given Canada's exceptionally high parliamentary turnover rates. While even a majority of those who had been defeated had experienced a relatively smooth passage from office, there was a significant difference between 'retirees' and defeated members: the defeated members were twice as likely as those who had stood down to experience '*a rocky switch*' (Doherty, 2001: p.19). There was a similar difference between those who returned to their previous careers and those who had begun afresh, with the former finding the transition less problematic.

The survey reveals a mixed picture from a financial point of view, with some former members earning higher salaries and others lower, than they had in office. This, Doherty stated, is in contrast to former senators and representatives in the US, the majority of whom do substantially better after serving in office. There is some indication from the survey respondents that specific experiences in office played a part in the softness or otherwise of the subsequent landing, with positions that had involved many contacts in the business community offering more possibilities later. Most respondents nevertheless appeared relatively sanguine about their transition to life after political office. It should be borne in mind, however, that the quarter of CAFPP members that had chosen to respond to the survey might well have had a different perspective from the much larger percentage of non-respondents. In conclusion, the author hopes that his survey would enhance public understanding of the issues facing Canadian parliamentarians both in office and once they leave office.

An exploratory study of how ex-politicians come to terms with electoral defeat was carried out in Canada by Shaffir and Kleinknecht (2005). The work is based on the transcribed interviews of 45 former federal and provincial parliamentarians from the three main political parties who had been electorally defeated, looking at their experience of defeat in the immediate term. These 45 were drawn from a larger group of about 70 interviews, but it is not clear how they were selected. They include not only defeated former politicians but also parliamentary clerks and administrative officials employed by the political parties. Interviewees had from three to thirty years of

legislative (mostly backbench) experience between them, and the majority was male. The interviews were carried out within five years of defeat. Their results powerfully convey the intensity of the trauma of defeat and its impact *'Defeat represents rejection at its extreme: 'You didn't get fired by one person; you got fired by 6,000'* (Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005: p.715). Imagery of death, sometimes striking, was volunteered by about a third and acknowledged by about two thirds of the total sample. One interviewee, for example, compared the experience of loss to a miscarriage, *'It's a different death. It's a death that no one grieves with you'* (Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005: p.715). The authors go on to consider the means by which the defeated politicians had come to terms with their loss, referring to that they called 'deflection rhetoric'. In order to avoid blame and cope with defeat, perhaps associated with guilt and shame, interviewees attributed their defeat to a range of external factors over which they could have had little control: the party leader; policies that had been adopted; the timing of the election; negative portrayal in the media; and poor personal health. The authors observe that whilst the rhetoric absolves the individual of responsibility, *'it fails to totally alleviate the sense of failure and disappointment associated with the loss'* (Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005: p.731). The vast majority of their group would stand again, given the opportunity. They go on to comment from other data that they have (not in the paper), that the stigma of defeat impedes an ex-politician's efforts to secure gainful employment.

Williams (2011) later study of post Cabinet life in the Ontario legislature explores the attitudes and behaviours of ex-ministers, that is, those who had lost their frontbench position but who remained in the legislature, rather than having lost their constituencies. She conducted a qualitative study with 11 ex-ministers who had either resigned or left the Cabinet as a result of a reshuffle, over a four-month period in 2011. Williams argues that whilst Cabinet membership is often regarded as the pinnacle of political achievement in the legislature, her research undermines any notion that ex-ministers disappear into obscurity on the backbenches and/ or experience disenchantment and tension. While there may be an initial shock and a period of disappointment at being dropped from the Cabinet, *'they are not disillusioned, frustrated or embittered by not having this opportunity anymore.'* It should be borne in mind, however, that the interviews were relatively short (half an hour or under). Williams suggests three personality types – the Maverick, the Valedictorian and the

Good Soldier – that encapsulates the ex-ministers’ approach to having sought office, to serving in Cabinet and to the trajectory of their future careers but it is hard to gauge how robust this classification is from the paper. She suggested that ex-ministers should be nurtured as mentors, *‘their skills must be cultivated in order to maximize their potential to lead outside of Cabinet.’*

## From the USA

In a similar vein, but from the perspective solely of a political scientist in the **United States**, Reeher (2006) garnered the personal stories of state legislators to portray what it is really like to be a politician, against a background of the general public’s increasing distrust, low regard for and cynicism about politicians. Reeher set out to hear the narratives of how legislators had come to enter politics; their experience of serving in office; and of their decision to stay or leave the political arena. Despite the plethora of work on legislators in academic political science, he too finds it strange that there has been so little work on them as *people*, what motivates them to run, what they risk, and what may drive them away.

Reeher interviewed 77 legislators serving in the lower houses of Connecticut, New York and Vermont during the 1990s, and conducted 23 follow-up interviews four to five years later. In addition, he draws on survey responses from 233 legislators in the same three states, together with data from official records of individual legislators’ characteristics and activities. Although his focus is on state legislators, Reeher, maintains that his arguments apply both upwards (to Congress) and downwards (to the municipal level). Through their stories, the politicians in Reeher’s work are portrayed very differently from the public’s caricature of them. They are an ambitious but they share a commitment to serving the public good and have deep roots in their communities. Their job satisfaction is fuelled by a sense of personal efficacy, that what they do really matters, *‘the joy of mattering’* (p.71). But it is at some cost: of overwork, overwhelming demands and often, a strained family life. Decisions to stay or to go are complicated affairs, a product of many different factors, both personal and political. But regardless of any particular set of factors or outcome, many legislators agonise over the decision. Reeher’s study does not interview legislators after they have left office except for the few who had previously lost office but were subsequently re-

elected. With public political discourse becoming coarser, Reeher makes a plea for the understanding of politics, not least of its practitioners, to be more nuanced and discerning.

### **From the United Kingdom**

On the other side of the Atlantic in the **United Kingdom**, Kevin Theakston has led systematic attempts to understand what happens to MPs once they have left the House of Commons (Theakston, Gouge and Honeyman, 2007; Byrne and Theakston, 2016). In the 2007 study of MPs leaving the Westminster Parliament in 2007, Theakston and colleagues sent a 43-item questionnaire in October 2006, to all of the then 343 members of the Association of the Former Members of Parliament (AFMP), to which 184 (54 percent) responded. Of these, 72 (39 per cent) had been electorally defeated and 112 (60 per cent) had 'retired', that is, they had not stood in the election. Membership of the AFMP is open to all former Members of Parliament and hence respondents had left Parliament at different elections, from 1970 to 2005.

The survey covers a range of areas including reasons for standing down, reasons for defeat, the reactions of the former parliamentarians themselves as well as others, the practicalities involved with leaving the Commons, as well as next steps, not least looking for work. Their sample of former MPs contains broadly three groups: those who were around the age of 65 and had decided that their parliamentary career should come to an end; those, mostly younger, who had lost their seat in the election or, fewer, as a result of boundary changes; and a smaller group who chose to leave to pursue other career possibilities. Note that nearly 25 per cent of the respondents had been appointed to the House of Lords, a figure that seems significantly higher than for MPs generally. It is difficult to make exact comparisons as the percentage of MPs who are appointed to the Lords varies from time to time. But, for example, 4.96 per cent of MPs who left during or after the 2001-05 Parliament were appointed to the Lords, and 4.4 per cent of those who sat in the 2005-10 Parliament (House of Lords Library).

The research highlights common issues. Emotional reactions to leaving the Commons varied widely but were most problematic for those who had experienced electoral defeat (or had been deselected) that had been unexpected in a third of cases. In the

immediate period of defeat, a significant minority acknowledged having felt shocked, angry and upset. A number mentioned how much constant campaigning had been needed to nurse their marginal constituency, only then to be swept away in the tide of a national swing.

The effect of defeat was acknowledged to last a considerable time for about a quarter (24 per cent), for a couple, '*still continuing*' or '*for six years*' (Theakston, Gouge and Honeyman, 2007: p.6). Nearly half, however, responded that leaving the Commons had not led to any decline in self-perception.

Family and friends, unsurprisingly, were cited as the main source of support and some respondents felt that the parties or Parliament itself could offer more help to defeated MPs to adjust and to find employment. Many missed the buzz of the Commons and being at the centre of things but this had to be weighed against the long hours and the strain on family life.

Almost all the respondents in this survey had continued to be active in public life in some guise, whether in their political party, local organisations or on public bodies. They felt that they had skills honed as parliamentarians that could have been drawn on, yet over half felt that not enough use was being made of what they could offer. Theakston et al commented that their respondents appeared overwhelmingly as a group of public-minded individuals and they questioned whether the skills and experience that they had was used by civil society to the extent that it could have been.

Theakston's Leeds group returned to a similar theme in their survey of former MPs who left Parliament in 2010 (Byrne and Theakston, 2016). They sent a postal survey to all 225 of those who had left: 149 had stood down while 76 had been defeated. In addition, they conducted a number (unspecified) of personal interviews although there are no details about the nature of these interviews or how interviewees were selected. They received 67 responses, a rate of 34 per cent, which is not unreasonable but it was significantly lower than in their previous survey. The authors attribute this in part to the fact that their survey from 2010 contacted all departing MPs whereas their earlier study contacted only members of the Association of Former Members of Parliament who, for a variety of reasons, may have been more likely to reply.

Byrne and Theakston (2016) highlight the profound effects of the MPs' expenses scandal of 2009 on both the former MPs themselves and their families that in part accounted for the almost record number of MPs who left the House of Commons in 2010. The most common reason in this study for standing down given was age, cited by 60 per cent of respondents, followed by 25 per cent who cited a desire to spend more time with their family. In contrast to the findings of Shaffir and Kleinknecht's (2005) study, most of the former MPs who had been defeated in Byrne and Theakston's survey, replied that they had not been surprised to lose their seat. The authors speculate that one of the reasons for their contradictory findings might have been that former MPs claimed retrospectively to have been less shocked than they had been as a way of coping with their loss. Former MPs missed much the same aspects of being in the House of Commons as in the earlier study: being able to make a difference; being in the political centre of things; and the social aspects of being an MP. The incessant demands, long working hours and the incursions into family life were however not missed. That the rules around MPs' housing arrangements had changed so significantly, thus further compromising family life was described as a bone of contention for Byrne and Theakston's departing MPs. Of note, former female MPs were likely to leave at a younger age, and they tended to have had a shorter time in Parliament than their male counterparts.

Byrne and Theakston (2016) point to the significant differences in the way that former MPs reacted to their exit from Parliament in their research. Although overwhelmingly their respondents were relieved to have left, there were notable differences between those who had chosen to stand down and those who had been defeated. 14 per cent of the former group reported feeling depressed after the election compared with half of the latter. Of those who had been defeated, 11 per cent reported feeling angry whereas none of those standing down had. Many commented that they had experienced a sense of grief or a loss of identity after leaving political office. 57 per cent of respondents had taken up paid work after leaving Parliament, but a higher figure, 70 per cent, of those under the age of 65 had done so. Half the sample was paid more than they had been as an MP, 39.5 per cent less and 10.5 per cent about the same. A clear majority reported that their post-parliamentary career was more satisfying than their parliamentary one with women significantly more likely to report higher satisfaction with their subsequent careers. On the other hand, it took some time

for many to find employment: 42 per cent of those seeking paid employment in Byrne and Theakston's study were out of work three months after leaving Parliament and 11 per cent of the total were out of work a year after leaving. A large number felt that their status as a former MP had hampered their efforts to find employment in addition to their having taken a substantial period out of a career prior to entering Parliament. The more senior the former MP had been, unsurprisingly, the less difficult it had been to find work. As in the 2007 study, many respondents believed that their skills and experience were being wasted in the labour market and in public life more generally, although many were involved in charitable work. Byrne and Theakston (2016) conclude that the transition out of political office needed to be made less problematic.

Weinberg (2007) has investigated quite how challenging the circumstances of MPs can be. He conducted a study on the psychological impact of 'surviving', losing or leaving the role of an MP in the Westminster Parliament following a General Election. Questionnaires were sent to 132 MPs six months after the election and again about two years later. They found that there had been small decreases in levels of physical symptoms of stress reported by former MPs compared with two years previously but both psychological and physical symptom levels were still higher than those of surviving MPs. Increased psychological symptoms of stress were reported by those losing their jobs compared with those who had taken the decision themselves to leave. Weinberg (2012) calls for more longitudinal research into the differential impact of either losing or deliberately leaving a political job and that the support offered by many modern organisations at times of redundancy was needed by ex-MPs. A more recent paper (Flinders, Weinberg A, Weinberg J et al, 2020) details the main pressures, some unique, that politicians face using a three-level 'stressors framework' as a starting point for what the authors hope will stimulate further research.

Having explored the culture of the House of Commons through interviews with MPs over 20 years, Kwiatkowski (2015) writes a reflective piece about how psychologically difficult it may be to leave the Commons. Parliament is replete with traditional and powerful symbols: MPs are rapidly socialised into the institution and strong friendships are formed. No wonder then that, *'There will be an inevitable period of mourning for what they have lost, and can never have again'* (p. 37).

A recent report, *Cognitive Strain in Parliament*, (Baldwin et al, 2020), reviews the strain of life in Parliament, amongst them the 'temporal' strain of often precarious employment (citing my monograph). The sample interviewed was however very small – eight interviews, purposively selected, four former and four current parliamentarians. Interviewees noted the lack of support for MPs who lost their seats and lack of attention to the transition process.

Otherwise, there is little else in the academic literature on the fate of British parliamentarians but both Peter Riddell and Jeremy Paxman have written well-researched, thoughtful and convincing journalistic accounts about the politicians who govern us, and what drives them (Riddell, 1996; Paxman, 2002) and how unprepared they mostly are for their political end. Despite the widespread perception that former MPs easily pick up positions in the corporate sector, only a tiny number at the very top of the political tree do so (Gonzalez-Bailon, Jennings and Lodge, 2013; Byrne and Theakston, 2016).

Graffin and his colleagues (2013) took the opportunity of the expenses scandal of 2009 in the Westminster Parliament to examine the potential hazards of high status associated with political office and their work does have some bearing on the reasons for MPs leaving Parliament in 2010. They found that while 'high status' MPs (those who had received an honour and/or who had sat on the front bench) were not more likely to have abused the expenses system than 'low status' MPs, they were more likely to have been targeted by the press for any inappropriate expenses claims. They were therefore more likely to exit Parliament as a result.

## **Summary**

There are not many papers examining the experience of transition from office of politicians who have not achieved the highest office although the literature from Canada is richer than elsewhere. There are reflections, mostly of a self-justifying nature from autobiographies, but little about the emotional and psychological consequences of leaving office; and barely anything about impact on partners and wider family impact. There is relatively little systematic from the UK except that spearheaded by Kevin Theakston and his colleagues from Leeds and that from Ashley



Weinberg. There appears to be a vacuum with regard to local government leadership. Given these gaps, there is nothing that considers what, if any, the impact may be on our democratic system of the experience of transition from political office. But this may be informed by the notion of 'office dependency', a topic to which I now turn.

### **8.1.2 Office dependency**

Taking a historical view, Keane (2011) notes how the notion of 'office holding' only emerged as representative democracy came to be understood from the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a new, different and inherently better model of government. In such a system, people had a genuine choice about who governed them; representatives were elected to act in defence of the interests of those who had put them into office. Keane observes that the experience of holding high office is a habit that can be hard to kick and its leaving is *'often synonymous with the collapse of a personal world'* (Keane, 2011: p.283). *'Office dependency'*, a malady in his terms, is partly fostered by the perks of office but more saliently, by the deep personal satisfaction both from advancing cherished policy goals and the narcissistic fulfillment gained. Keane quotes Gareth Evans, a former Australian foreign minister's term, *'relevance deprivation syndrome'* (Keane, 2011: p.284), to describe the pain of leaving office.

Keane is struck by the odd silence about the fate of leaders once they have been efficiently but peacefully dispensed with. That they should be so dispensed of was, of course, part of the democratic advance. Keane quotes approvingly Thomas Jefferson's advice in 1811 that there is, *'a fullness of time when men should go, and not occupy too long the ground to which others have a right to advance'* (Keane, 2011: p.280).

A range of checks to office dependency may be in place in different democratic systems (such as limiting the number of terms that can be served, recall by the electorate) but Keane argues that the key test of democratic strength is the degree to which a distinction is made between those who hold office and those who have left office. He points to the growing intolerance in the last hundred years or so of the British parliamentary system to prime ministers hanging on to high office. Keane (2011) here concentrates on the holders of very high office but he acknowledges that, *'the malady*

*may affect office holding at all levels*' (p.283). Owen (2006: p.551) too focuses on heads of government when they stay in office for too long and manifest a 'hubris syndrome' as a result of an intoxication with power that is '*as great a menace to the quality of their leadership as are conventional illnesses*'. On leadership, Kets de Vries (2003: p.xvi) writes from a psychoanalytic perspective, observing that, '*One of the dangers of narcissism is the difficulty leaders have in letting go*'.

Structural mechanisms such as term limits have been introduced, predominantly in the state legislature of USA since the late 1980s in response to grassroots popular pressure (Caress and Kunioka, 2012). Although there was little hard evidence either in support of or against term limits when they were introduced, it has become more evident that term limits have had significant effects on how state governments operate depending on the term restriction imposed, and some consequences have been unexpected (Caress and Kunioka, 2012). But in any case, Riddell (1995) argues that formal term limits would not be appropriate in the UK, not least because there is no separation of powers between the executive and the legislative as in the USA.

### **8.1.3 Insights from other transitions**

There are useful, highly relevant insights from the literature studying transitions in general (Ashforth, 2012) and in particular redundancy, retirement, bereavement (e.g. Vickers, 2009; Wang, 2013). This literature demonstrates that each transition is a process over time influenced by different variables, with multiple meanings and impact beyond the financial and practical for individuals and families. The social and psychological consequences of job loss have increasingly been highlighted with recognition that a grief reaction may occur (Vickers, 2009), and the fact that its intensity is related to the degree of attachment to that which has been lost. The rich psychological literature on loss deepens understanding of grief and job loss, suggesting that grief is better understood as a loss, not just of the other but of part of the self, that disrupts an individual's 'assumptive world' (Freud, 2017; Murray Parkes, 1971; Marris, 1993).

There is also some interest in what happens to specific post-holders, for example, chief executive officers or people in specific occupations, such as top athletes or

members of the armed forces, once they move on. In contrast to the loss of political office, there is a burgeoning literature on athletic retirement, whether planned or forced by injury (e.g. Lally, 2007; Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994) that suggests that the degree of voluntariness in retiring, the degree to which identity is wholly consumed by sport, and subjective perception of athletic achievement, all influence adjustment to retirement.

#### **8.1.4 Role exit**

Sociological insights into the possible impact of the loss of political office may be gained from wider sources particularly with regard to 'role exit' defined by Ebaugh (1988: p.1) as, '*the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role*'. A former nun turned academic, Ebaugh was curious that so little scholarly attention had been paid to the experience of 'exes', in contrast to the interest that there had been to role entrance and the process of socialisation into a role. Some years later on, Ashworth (2012) observes still the lopsided-ness of research between role entry and exit.

Ebaugh's book draws on data from four separate samples of interviewees: a group of 57 ex-nuns in 1971; a follow-up of 12 ex-nuns in 1985; 106 exes of different types, for example retirees, widows, and former doctors; and 10 transsexuals in 1985. Interviews were semi-structured in style and lasted about two hours with reflections encouraged. All interviewees had chosen to leave although, as Ebaugh argues, their decisions to go had not always been entirely voluntary. From her data, she draws 11 properties of the role-exit process that emerged as central variables influencing the nature and consequences of the process. These are listed in my monograph and considered there in the context of politicians losing elected office.

Disengagement from an old role is a complex process that '*involves shifts in reference groups, friendship networks, relationships with former group members, and most important, shifts in a person's sense of self-identity*' (Ebaugh, 1988: p.181). Ebaugh distinguishes an ex-member of a group from a non-member: the new identity of the ex incorporates the vestiges of the previous role, and to a much greater extent where there had been very high intensity of attachment to that role. She writes that '*the*

*process of role exiting involves tension between an individual's past, present and future'* (Ebaugh, 1988: p.149), and she points to the adjustment and adaptation required not just by the individual making the transition but on the part of significant others associated with them. Ebaugh's central contention is that role exit is a process that can be generalised to all types of exits. Most, but not all, of her interviewees had exited roles with varying degrees of voluntariness. She advocates further studies that compared voluntary and involuntary exits.

While Ebaugh argues that people historically were much less mobile in terms of role change, thus accounting the lack of attention to role exit prior to her work, the mobility associated with leaving political office has long been an essential prerequisite of a representative democracy. The relative lack of attention to this specific role exit may therefore be all the more surprising. Ebaugh did not include former politicians in her study.

I move on now to the literature on place attachment and place leadership.

## **8.2 Place, place attachment and place leadership**

The vast literature on place, place attachment and place leadership is found across many different academic disciplines. I focus here on place attachment and attachment theory as the most relevant to my research questions and to some of the literature on place leadership that illustrates how little attention is given to the feeling that people have for place itself.

### **8.2.1 Place**

The notion of place has long been contested, not least between different academic disciplines - and Massey (2004) makes clear that any one 'place' itself is often subject to contested negotiation. Agnew (1987) sought to bring place back from its neglect in political sociology and to assert '*the geographical rootedness of political life*' (Agnew, 1987: p.1), proposing the now well-known elements of locale, location and sense of place. Cresswell (2015: p.19) goes further, '*Place at a basic level is space invested with meaning in the context of power*'. Note that these definitions of place seem to

embrace place at many different spatial levels. Lest we think geographical place is any less important in our digital age, the Civil Society Futures report (2018: p.16) makes clear: *'Local places matter to many of us, perhaps even more in a digital age – to meet real people, talk eye to eye. Place matters just as much to young people as to older generations.'*

### **8.2.2. Place attachment**

That emotions akin to grief are seen when populations are forcibly displaced is well-acknowledged (Fried, 2000; Brown and Perkins, 1992; Marris, 1993). Low and Altman (1992: p.2) define the term place attachment simply as *'the bonding of people to places.'* They recognise that the physical environment of place is often entwined with human experiences in that place: it is *'a milieu which embeds and is a repository of a variety of life experiences, it is central to those experiences and is inseparable from them,'* (Low and Altman, 1992: p.10). Writing in the relative early days of the study of place attachment, these authors imply that place attachment may contribute to the formation, maintenance and preservation of a person or a group, with place attachment playing a role in fostering individual and collective self-esteem and pride.

Since the early 1990's, there has been more systematic investigation into the nature of the 'affective bonds' between individuals and their physical environment (Guilini, 2003). Of note, Hernandez et al (2007: p.310) define place attachment as *'as the affective link that people establish with specific settings, where they tend to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe,'* chiming with the need for security underpinning attachment theory. I shall adopt this definition, aware that there remains a diversity of perspectives on place attachment and debate about its definition (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2014).

Tomaney (2010: p.311) contends that the notion of place attachment has been disdained within the social sciences as essentially regressive and insular, and that discussions about it *'are always pushed to the margins of thinking about regions and places.'* He seeks *'to rescue local attachments and a sense of belonging from the condescension of the cosmopolites and, instead, to present a defence of parochialism'* and of a parochial outlook that *'values its local, its culture and its*

*solidarities'* (Tomaney, 2013). Pabst (2021: p.113) agrees, '*Land with its material reality and its symbolic significance is central to people's sense of belonging. Beginning with local and national roots does not rule out the possibility of building relationships with people across borders ...*'

Attempts have been made to clarify the relationship between place attachment and a number of other terms such as 'place identity' (e.g. Twigger-Ross, Bonaiuto and Breakwell (2003); Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2014). Place identity, a term introduced by Proshanky, Fabian and Kaminott (1983) is seen as an element of identity – how we see ourselves - that develops through the relationship established both with the physical environment of a place and the nature of the social interactions experienced in that place. Attachment to place seems to be formed prior to place identity (Hernandez et al, 2007). Twigger-Ross, Bonaiuto and Breakwell (2003) suggest no special theory is needed to explain place identity: it is just one component of identity amongst others. Our identity(ies) will inevitably be influenced by history and context (Bauman, 2004) and there will inevitably be many overlapping place-based identities that juggle with our other identities (Kenny, 2019). Both place attachment and place identity may differ depending on spatial scale (Bernardo and Palma-Oliviera, 2013).

There have been some efforts in the last twenty years to explore the links between place attachment as conceptualised in environmental psychology and human geography and Bowlby's attachment theory (Fried, 2000; Guilini, 2003; Morgan, 2010; Scannell and Gifford, 2014). Guilini (2003) identifies many similarities in the affective relationships between human beings and between people and places, such as persistence over time, a desire for residential stability and distress at involuntary displacement from a place, and an association of 'home' – however defined – with security and comfort (although not for all) but they are '*by no means an exact analogy*' (Guilini, 2003: p.160). She suggests that a key difference lies in the evolutionary framework of attachment theory in contrast to the socio-cultural perspective dominant in environmental psychology: any argument of the adaptive function of place is, Guiliani argues, in contrast to Bowlby's theory, marginal. Guiliani (2003: p.160) adds that attachment theory '*has focused primarily on infancy and early childhood*' thus seeming to pay little heed to the huge volume of research of attachment in adolescents and adults since the 1980's. Of note, Bahi-Fleury (1996, cited in Guilini, 2003: p.152)

found that high mobility in childhood is associated with a greater desire for stability in adulthood. Writing a decade later, Scannell and Gifford (2014: p.23) remark on the separate development of place attachment theory and 'interpersonal attachments', their term for Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, and that '*a more comprehensive comparison of the two theories has yet to be developed.*' They acknowledge that both inter-personal and place attachment bonds form over time but that the development of place attachment bonds is less well understood; and that in both areas, bonds can form with multiple people and places but that the hierarchy for place attachments has not been investigated. Scannell and Gifford (2014: p.32) conclude that '*the combined study of inter-personal and place attachment offers one connection between developmental, social and environmental psychology ... that each informs and enriches the other.*' Notably, Bowlby (1998: p.178) himself writes how, '*by remaining within a familiar environment an animal, or a human, knows at once where food and water are to be found, not only at different seasons of the ordinary year but also during the exceptionally bad years that occur from time to time; he knows too where shelter from the weather can be got, where there are trees or cliffs or caves that provide safety*'. Indeed, Bowlby in conversation observed that foxes were attached to their dens, not just to the vixen (Kraemer, 2020, personal communication) seemingly a different view from that which he was reported by Stevenson-Hinde (2007) to have held earlier when he insisted that the term attachment should be used to describe an emotional bond only with a person.

### **8.2.3 Place leadership**

Within the literature on **place leadership**, mostly within urban and regional studies and leadership studies, the term seems to be used variously, and, I observe, sometimes elided with city/ city region leadership perhaps as a result of the impetus given to place leadership by '*the new urban competitiveness agenda*' (Jackson, 2019). On the other hand, some researchers have specifically examined rural leadership in place-based development (for example, Horlings, Roep and Wellbrock, 2018). It seems that a country/ nation is rarely considered as 'place' in this context.

Place leadership is best understood as involving decisions and actions that have regard to the communities within any one place in contrast to 'place-less' leaders who

have little concern for the geographical impact of their decisions (Hambleton and Howard, 2013). Even so the feelings that people have for 'their' place '*have been seriously neglected in both the leadership literature and the public service innovation literature*' (Hambleton and Howard, 2013: p.55).

It is not as though place has no importance within the literature on place leadership but the focus of interest seems to be more about what goes on within any place rather than about the affective component of the relationship that people have with place. With a background in geography, Jackson (2019) writes persuasively of the need to bring place into the foreground of thinking about public leadership. He emphasises the importance of multi-scalar, dynamic and interactive governance processes between national, regional and local actors and across different agencies in the public and private sectors in a place. While Jackson (2019: p.211) refers to how '*place can foster loving attachment and it can harness care, enhancement and stewardship*' (as well as greed and territoriality) and he acknowledges how place can be used as a resource for forging a common identity, his thrust remains on processes of collective leadership and the links with collaborative governance rather than on the way in which the affective feelings for place can best be harnessed in the exercise of leadership.

The matter is further complicated by 'place' often being ill-defined other than in those places defined by clear administrative boundaries. But even then, administrative boundaries may not accord with people's sense of place – that may well vary significantly from one person to another. It is acknowledged that places differ in their geography, economy, politics and demography with Collinge and Gibney (2010: p.387) observing, '*some places appear better able than others to exploit the messy and uncertain processes of social and economic transition and change*'. Hambleton and Howard (2013) suggest a conceptual framework for place leadership that distinguishes three different but over-lapping 'realms' within a place – political leadership, managerial professional leadership, and community and business leadership – with innovation arising from the areas of overlap. They emphasise a shift in thinking from government to governance (Hambleton and Howard, 2013) that recognizes the diffusion of responsibility across different sectors for the provision of services within a locality.



Collinge and Gibney (2010) point to the power of agency particularly with regard to the importance of 'softer' relational interactions in economic development. Sotarauta et al (2017: p.191) also move more towards the notion that '*place leadership is fundamentally about social interaction*', but I question whether this is not true of leadership in any organisation rather than place leadership *per se*? They urge a better understanding of how and to what the extent places are shaped by human relationships and interactions and more specifically how concepts such as leadership can be useful to explain how these places evolve. But again, there is little reference to how the powerful feelings that people have about where they live can be harnessed for the exercise of leadership.

In exploring the leadership of directly elected local authority mayors, Fenwick and Elcock (2014) acknowledge that the '*meaning of place and locality remains uncertain in local public policy in England and it is a big challenge*'. Any serious expansion of the mayoral agenda '*requires a resolution of this difficult question of place*'. Fai (2018: p.34) however sees the new combined authorities in England as 'Beacons of the Place-Based Agenda' arguing that the essence of these authorities' responsibilities is making decisions that reflect the intricacies of the local environment - although it is not clear why combined authorities should be any different from local authorities in this respect. Furthermore, the combined authorities mostly cover a large area - being composed of a number of local authorities – that may not be seen as a place in itself, Tees Valley for example (Roberts, 2020).

In **summary**, as helpful as a shift in approach towards a more plural, boundary spanning and networked view of leadership in places may be, it is surely not of itself 'reconceptualising' place leadership? A welcome and more realistic shift, certainly, but it does not address the feelings that people have for their place and the role that place itself can play for political leadership especially. It seems a curiously passive, almost technocratic, approach to place leadership where place is viewed simply as a territory or a receptacle within which activities and processes of various sorts take place.

With my understanding of attachment theory and its potential application to place, my research on place leadership sought to understand how leaders of the new English combined authorities and council leaders understood the place that they represented

and the feelings that they and their constituents had for place, how they exercised leadership of place, how they worked with others exercising leadership of place.

## **9. Contribution to the field**

My research taken as a whole contributes to leadership studies by suggesting that insights from attachment theory can contribute to the theory and the exercise of political leadership. Despite the 'relational turn' that the study of leadership has taken (Uhl-Bien, 2006), advances in our understanding of leadership from developmental psychology and how human relationships flourish appear to have been limited.

### **9.1 Contribution to theory**

My work extends theory on political leadership in a number of ways. First, in addition to the literature on attachment theory and leadership on leaders as attachment figures and Mayseless and Popper's (2007) thinking on attachment to social institutions, I argue that individuals may form bonds of attachment to the role of political office that when disrupted, may cause distress and, at times, grief. This is not dissimilar, as discussed earlier, from findings in scholarly work on job loss about the impact of retirement and redundancy from the workplace (for example, Vickers, 2009) but as suggested previously, there are additional factors that mean that the bond formed to a political role is more akin to an attachment bond than to most other work roles. The distress over a considerable period of time for many of the individuals and partners involved at the loss of political office is largely unrecognised.

Secondly, I extend my work from the human, personal level to explore the possible wider implications of a problematic transition from political office for representative democracy. This resonates with Keane's (2011) notion of 'office dependency', and Owen's (2006) suggestion of a 'hubris syndrome' but both these authors focus on high government office. I suggest that there is an impact from the manner in which politicians at all levels of governance leave office: on who stands as a political candidate in the first place, and on how long successful candidates may stay in office once elected. Drawing on thinking about democratic rotation (Petracca, 1992), I

introduce the idea of ‘political fluidity’ and argue that a reasonable degree of fluidity into and out of political office is helpful for a healthy sustainable democracy,

Thirdly, I consider some of the current literature on place attachment alongside that on place leadership. Having noted the neglect of people’s affective feelings for place in the place leadership literature, I draw on attachment theory and, to a lesser extent, social identity theory, to suggest that such feelings can be harnessed, for good or ill, in the exercise of political leadership. In so doing, I am proposing a more active role for place than in much of existing literature on place leadership.

My work also extends thinking on attachment theory into wider political, social and policy domains, not entirely without precedent as Bowlby’s 1946 essay on psychology and democracy demonstrates, but with the undoubted benefit of the work of attachment theorists since then. It roots attachments not just to significant others but to a highly valued elected political role and to a place(s), in biology and in the fundamental human need to belong. I have indicated however where some caution is necessary in my argument in order to avoid the charge of the ‘*over-reaching*’ of claims for attachment theory, justifiably warned against by Sroufe (2018).

## **9.2 Contribution to understanding**

My study on the loss of political office is the first empirical study in the UK systematically to use interviews, rather than surveys, to explore the loss of political office. It demonstrates not only the degree of distress that is common among politicians leaving office but also some understanding of why. The work has identified some of the factors that can mitigate and/ or exacerbate the distress that may be part of the transition from office. It is distinctive in considering the considerable impact of this transition on partners and families as well as on individual politicians. Furthermore, my findings demonstrate how the knowledge, skills and experience of politicians are often not recognised or made use of by employers, political parties or civil society. In introducing the idea of political fluidity and how this may be affected by the difficulties encountered in the transition from office, I contribute to academic and to policy debate on the professionalisation of politics.

With an empirically based overview of the early leadership of the early combined authorities, set within the wider context of English governance and literature on place and leadership, my work contributes to scholarly work on local governance, devolution and place leadership. It is one of the earliest papers published on the leadership of the first six combined authorities and therefore usefully illuminates how the six metro mayors initially approached their role. The work contributes to the policy debate on devolution, as evidenced by the invitation from Steven McCabe and Beverley Nielsen at Birmingham City University, on the recommendation of Professor Robin Hambleton, to contribute a chapter on devolution in the context of Brexit, and the invitation to write for the LSE Public Policy Unit. With its focus on the usefulness of understanding the power of people's attachment to place, my work could inform not only the exercise of political leadership but policy makers too at a time when debates rage about local governance, agency and place.

### **9.3 Contribution to practice**

From my work, I make a series of recommendations directed at different audiences – individuals, partners, families, employers, parliamentary institutions, local government and civil society – regarding practical measures that could be taken to smooth the transition from political leadership roles. I suggest, for example, that individual politicians – with their partners – could usefully anticipate at least a period of discomfiture during and after they leave office for which they may well need the support of close friends and family and plan (if possible) flexibly for a new chapter in their lives and a new narrative about who they are. Political parties and political institutions could do far better with little extra resource by; acknowledging the contribution that politicians have made, often at some personal cost; marking their leaving; ensuring that the advice available to other professionals facing redundancy or retirement is extended to former politicians; and harnessing, rather than squandering, the skills and experience of former politicians more effectively than has been done to date. But we all have a responsibility as citizens to leave salaciousness aside and to recognise the personal cost to political leaders in relinquishing a much-cherished role even in democratic terms, the leaving of political office is a fundamental element.

This has attracted the interest of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) in their work to improve support for MPs leaving Parliament (as detailed below). Yet, as evidenced both from my interviews with current politicians and the paucity of literature on the experiences of politicians leaving office, that there is a reluctance to dwell on the political 'after-life', perhaps akin to a discomfort at talking about mortality more generally.

My research has had some influence on the Sixth Determination (the scheme for the salaries, terms and conditions of Welsh Members of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) and their support staff) set by the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd of which I am an appointed member. The Determination that will apply from May 2021 makes explicit provision to facilitate parliamentarians making the transition from elected office into other employment. I know of only the Norwegian Storting (Parliament) which makes (considerably more) provision for departing parliamentarians.

Having read my work, Dr Peter Ferguson, Senior Lecturer at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, in October 2020 and colleagues instigated a (remote) meeting with me on 20 October (GMT) 2020. with regard to a new project, Transitioning to Life after Parliament, commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria and the Victorian Former Members Association. They were keen to learn from my experience and suggested the possibility of future collaboration.

My impression both from my empirical work on the leadership of the English combined authorities and from my observations of political leaders is that practitioners intuitively grasp the importance of people's affective feeling for place, as Lammy (2020) also notes. But my work could be useful, for example, in reflective leadership development, particularly at a local level, in making explicit the importance of place. With its focus on people's attachment to place that may be at least as powerful as other attachments (Worpole, 2021), my work could however usefully inform policy makers as they grapple with the complexities of devolution across the United Kingdom, and of an increasingly heterogenous population that may be disaffected with politicians.

## **10. Commentary on the reception of the publications**

### **10.1 The monograph**

The monograph was launched at Church House, Westminster, in January 2017 at which Lord David Blunkett, Sir Charles Walker, OBE, MP, Professor Jean Hartley and I spoke. David Blunkett, who was one of the MPs interviewed on the record for the monograph soon after he had left the Commons in 2015, spoke in a highly complimentary way about the research and the book, observing in his speech that it was long overdue. He had contributed a praise quotation for the back of the book. Around 150-200 people were present including senior academics, Professor Kevin Theakston, Dr Ashley Weinberg and Professor Richard Kwiatkowski. Dr Weinberg subsequently invited me to contribute a chapter to the book he is editing on *The Psychology of Democracy*, and the LSE and the UCL Constitution Unit invited me to contribute blogs on their web-sites. Palgrave commented that more copies were sold at this launch than at many others. The launch of the monograph was reported in *The Municipal Journal* (16 February 2017), a local government trade journal. Professor Leighton Andrews at Cardiff University regularly uses the monograph in the module he teaches on public policy. Peter Riddell (2019) in his recent book, *'15 Minutes of Power'* has quoted extensively from the monograph (on pages 270-271).

Following the publication of my paper on the leadership of the English combined authorities in 2020, I was invited to contribute a blog to the LSE Democratic Audit site.

The monograph had been downloaded 1,400 times (according to Springer) and had 17 citations by 1 January 2021.

### **10.2 Journal papers**

The impact factors of the journals in which my papers have been published are as follows: *British Politics* 2018 1.02; *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 2018 0.51; *Local Government Studies* 2018 1.825.

The 2019 paper on Exiting the Political Stage (as in 6.2.1 above) has been cited three times (Google Scholar). The paper on the political leadership of the combined authorities was only published in February 2020. It has been cited five times so far but it is early days for its impact to be assessed. However, as a result of its publication, I have been interviewed by a policy officer from Localis, a local government think-tank about it; written an article at the request of Democratic Audit at the London School of Economics; and contributed a chapter to the book, *English Regions Post Brexit* (listed above).

### 10.3 Summary report

The 2015 **summary report** was published by the OU specifically three months before the UK General Election in 2015 in recognition that a number of MPs would soon be leaving Parliament, either having chosen to stand down or having been defeated, and that a report of this nature with practical recommendations might be useful at such a time.

The report was launched to an audience of around 75-100 at the House of Commons with Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP, DBE, Sir Charles Walker, OBE, MP and Professor Jean Hartley speaking as well as me.

### 10.4 Subsequent presentations

#### 10.4.1 Academic

- (i) I was a speaker, jointly with Dr Ashley Weinberg, on '**Losing Political Office**' at the Annual Meeting of the British Psychological Society, on 28 April 2016. See Roberts, J. and Weinberg, A. (2016) *Proceedings of the British Psychological Society*, 24.
- (ii) Second PUPOL (Public and Political Leadership) Conference, '**Political bed-blockers? The path from leadership and its implications for democracy**', The Open University, 6-7 April 2017.

- (iii) The Psychology of Democracy Conference, '**Political Exit. It can hurt ... us all.**' Salford University, 17 May 2017.
- (iv) Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Day Conference Attachment and Child Psychiatry, Keynote presentation, '**Attachment and Leadership**', 1 February 2018.
- (v) Third PUPOL (Public and Political Leadership) Conference, '**The leadership of people and place in the new English combined authorities**', 18-20 April 2018, Stockholm, Sweden.
- (vi) The Psychology of Democracy Conference, '**Do We Get the Wrong Politicians?**' Salford University 15 May 2019.
- (vii) International Studying Leadership Conference, UWE, Bristol, jointly with Dr Alessandro Sancino, '**Political Leadership and the Power of and for Place in Times of Populism**', 17 December 2019.

#### **10.4.2 Public Engagement**

- (i) I was invited to speak to the Chief Executive and staff at the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) in May 2017 about my research. I had interviewed a member of IPSA staff in the monograph. IPSA was keen to understand more about the impact of MPs losing their seats in order to inform how they dealt with such MPs before and after a General Election. They had been trying to mitigate some of the most difficult elements by, for example, separating out newly elected (and excited) MPs from those who had been defeated and collecting their belongings, and were keen to address this issue further.
- (ii) I was invited to speak at a training event, '**What next – Local Government Leadership as a career and next steps?**' part of the Local Government Association's Leaders' Programme 16-17 February 2015.



- (iii) The Association of Former Members of Parliament (AFMP) was very supportive of my research and published three articles for their newsletter, '*Order, Order*' in 2013, 2015 and 2017.
- (iv) Radio interviews on a series of local BBC stations where the MP had lost after the General Elections of 2015 and 2017.
- (v) Article on editorial page of The Sunday Express, '**Cameron has to find a role**' following David Cameron's resignation as Prime Minister, 18 September 2016.
- (vi) New Local Government Network (NLGN), a national think tank focusing on local government, blog '**Losing Political Office**,' 10 February 2017.
- (vii) The Tavistock Institute public seminar, '**Losing Political Office**' May 2018.
- (viii) New Local Government Network blog, '**Does being a Leader need to be a Full-Time Job?**' 2 July 2018.
- (ix) LSE Public Policy blog, '**We Need to Talk about Leaving**,' Sept 2018.
- (x) UCL Constitution Unit blog, '**Losing political office: what next for the Prime Minister?**' following the resignation of Theresa May, 19 June 2019.
- (xi) LSE Democratic Audit blog March 2020 '**Assessing England's metro-mayors: a mixed picture**'.

## 11. Some Personal Reflections

When I embarked on the research to explore the transition from political office, I had not intended to write a monograph nor to continue down an academic path. I was simply curious to know more about the experience of politicians as they left their political role, especially as relatively little seemed to have been written about it.

Given that I had myself been an elected politician – a councillor from 1990 to 2006 and Leader of the London Borough of Camden in the early 2000's – my curiosity was both motivated (in part) and inevitably coloured by my own experience of leaving an elected role. I had chosen to step down from the leadership of the council when my son was 14 years old and, especially as a child psychiatrist, I felt that he needed a parent home more regularly during his adolescence than had hitherto been possible. But it was an extraordinarily difficult decision to make: after the initial trepidation, I had relished my political role as council leader – it embraced my strongly held values and beliefs and it seemed that I could do the job effectively. As a psychiatrist, however, I knew that I would find leaving difficult. I was prepared. I had plans. But I was surprised by the degree of anguish it caused, despite the fact that I thought throughout that it had been the right decision and that I had a rewarding job and close family support. In contrast, it turned out later, I was not at all discomfited by leaving my consultant psychiatrist post after well over 20 years in 2016. There is something about political leadership that can be very seductive.

Throughout the research on the transition from political office, I was very mindful that my own experiences could unduly influence both the way in which I conducted the interviews and the analysis of them. I therefore took steps to minimise the extent of possible bias – although I acknowledge that a constructivist view of social science research would hold that it is not possible for a researcher to be completely set apart from the process of research (Elgie, 2015). The interview protocol was derived from my reading of the literature I could find, and I sought comments on it from three former politicians as well as from Professor Jean Hartley, my supervisor. In the analysis of the interviews, I was mindful to ensure that experiences different from mine, for example the four MPs who had positively welcomed leaving their political roles, were given proper weight. In addition, I tested out my initial findings as described in the initial report published by The Open University in 2015 with five former MPs who left Parliament in 2015. I conducted extended interviews with them that, with their consent, were attributable and which formed a separate chapter in the monograph.

On the other hand, my background as a former politician did undoubtedly help in the recruitment of participants for both the research on losing political office and on the

leadership of the combined authorities: I was seen by many as someone who could understand the nature of a political role and of local government and as someone who could be trusted with personal confidences. The response rates to my initial letters requesting interviews were, as documented, very high.

Despite my deep familiarity with attachment theory from a theoretical and a practice perspective, it was only after completing the research on the transition from office and on place leadership that I came to realise that attachment theory and the need to belong was the underpinning of both research studies.

In undertaking the research that underpins my published works submitted here, I have reflected in depth on what I have learned both as a practitioner and as an academic and how best to make sense of that learning across both practice and academic domains. The rigour necessary for a PhD has meant that I have had to delve deeply into the relevant literature and adopt a far more critical approach not only to the literature but also to my own assumptions. From what now appears to have been a first foray into exploring the links between attachment theory and public leadership with the joint editorship of a book over twenty years ago (Kraemer and Roberts, 1996), I have relished this opportunity to consider relevant literature across different disciplines and to interrogate and clarify my thinking on political leadership, in particular with regard to the fundamental human need to belong.

## **12. Conclusion**

My work presented here proposes that an understanding of attachment theory and the powerful nature of the human need to belong, of the bonds of attachment that form in consequence and of the distress that follows their disruption - can usefully inform scholarly work on political leadership. While the empirical work is focused on two separate projects - the leaving of a political leadership role and of the exercise of the leadership of place, intrinsic to any political leadership role – both are understood through the lens of attachment theory.

My study on losing political office is the first study systematically to conduct in-depth interviews with former parliamentarians and local government leaders, the first to interview their partners, and the first, to my knowledge, to consider politicians leaving elected office in local government. This has broken new ground. My findings and their analysis have contributed to theory, understanding and practice with regard both to individual politicians leaving office and their partners and the possible wider implications from the transition from office for representative democracy. While I argue that any individual who loses their much-cherished role as a political leader is likely to encounter some difficulties in making the transition from office, such is the nature of political office for many, it is possible that certain individuals are more vulnerable than others. There were certainly hints that this might be the case from my interviews but I did not seek to probe the childhood experiences of my interviewees as this was outside the scope of the research. An exploration of possible links between the attachment styles of former politicians and their experiences of the transition from office could be made – although there might be some reluctance to participate given the potential sensitivity of the area. In terms of future research, were my recommendations on smoothing the transition from office to be put into place (for example, providing a package of support to find other employment, better acknowledgement of the contribution made by the politicians in office), it would be interesting to investigate their effect, although with a number of variables at play, it would be a complex undertaking. But as much as there may be reluctance to pursue considerations of political mortality, as I have demonstrated, our representative democracy may well be enriched by such explorations. Stewart (2021: p.9), approving of Thomas More and other humanists, avers that *'politics is an activity that requires not the perpetual campaign for power but instead the possibility of resignation and refusing power. It is a vocation whose value can only be judged by its ending'*

My research on the leadership of the combined authorities in England was the first empirical study to cover the first six combined authorities, with confidential and often frank interviews with a range of different senior actors. It has provided insight into how the metro-mayors were approaching their new leadership role in its early days, particularly from a perspective of place. What place means to people and how people's feelings for place can be brought into academic work on political leadership may attract increasing interest from scholars as the debate on the future governance of and

devolution within the United Kingdom gathers pace. It may well be the subject of increasingly fierce public debate too as a subject that touches profoundly both hearts and minds.

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